

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A HOUSE BOAT

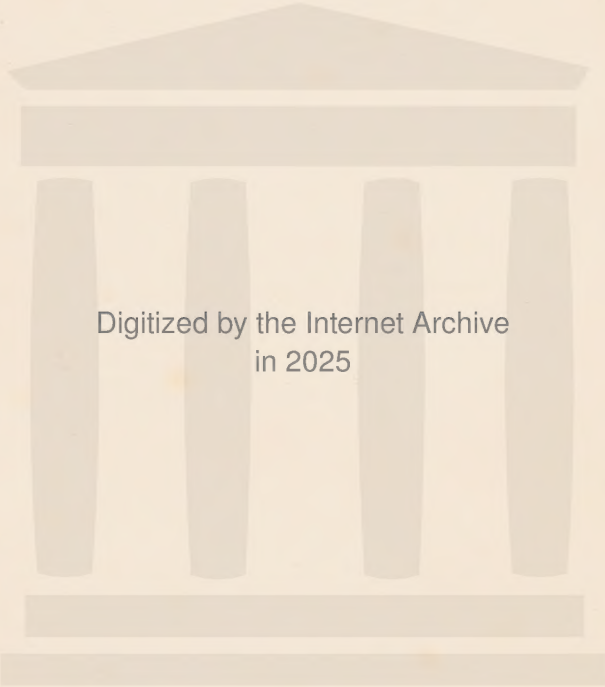


BY
WILLIAM
BLACK





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OF
A HOUSE-BOAT.

BY
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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A HOUSE-BOAT.



CHAPTER I.

“Next crown the bowl full
With gentle lamb’s-wool,
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger;
With store of ale, too,
And this ye must do
To make the wassail a swinger.”

“Do you know what true wisdom is?”

“No.”

“Would you like to be told?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will tell you,” says this most amiable and obliging Philosopher (whose brown hair, by-the-way, invariably looks prettiest in the sunlight; and on this joyous morning all the wide Severn valley is shining

clear). "I will tell you," she says blandly (though her eyes would seem to be chiefly engaged with the fair landscape all around her—the broad stream quivering in light, the ruddy banks hanging in foliage, the wide meadows, the ethereal blue hills at the horizon, and one distant black cloud from which descend streaks of grey, showing that away over there they are having a summer shower to slake the thirsting leaves). "True wisdom consists in recollecting how well off you are. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet people never do it. It's only their miseries they pay any heed to. The toothache, or an overcharged bill, or an ill-fitting dress will vex them beyond anything; but when they don't have these worries or any other, they forget to be grateful. They don't realise their good fortune. They don't reflect how glad they ought to be that at the present moment there isn't a bit of dust in their eye, and that their boots aren't pinching their toes, and that they are not crossing the English Channel in rough weather. You know what the physiologists say—that when you are not conscious of having any body at all—when you don't seem to be aware that you have got a head or a hand or a foot—then everything is going

well, and you are in perfect health : you know that ? ”

“ I’ve heard something of the kind.”

“ But people in that happy condition never think of congratulating themselves ! ” she says. “ They take it all as a matter of course ; they forget how lucky they are. When they have rheumatism, they make a mighty fuss ; but when they haven’t it, they don’t recollect that it’s a very nice thing to be able to walk, or move your arms, just as you please. Now, that is true wisdom—to remember how well off you are—and how many ailments you might have, and haven’t—and to be very grateful and thankful and contented.”

“ Yes, Miss Marcus Aurelius, that is all very well—for you,” one says to her. “ You ought to be content, certainly. Look at your position. You are young—you are passably good-looking—— ”

“ I thank you,” she says, in her cool American way.

“ ——you have excellent health and spirits—you have an abundance of friends and well-wishers—you have nothing in the world to do but look pretty and please people. It would be a singular thing if you were not well content. You would be as unreasonable as the

man in the ancient legend whose wife said to him, 'Well, Jim, you beat anything. You were drunk on Sunday night and you were drunk on Monday night; you were drunk on Wednesday night, and here you're drunk again on Friday night—that's already four nights in the week; and still you're grumbling! What more would you like? Would you like to be an angel?'"

"Ah, I see I can't make you understand," she says. "It isn't at all being merely content; you should make yourself happy by thinking of the various anxieties and ailments and distresses that you have suffered from or might suffer, and that you are now free from: it isn't content, it is congratulation. When I came outside this morning, and looked at the beautiful country all around, and breathed the delicious air—well, I don't know how to explain it—there was such a delight—and the only grievance I could invent was that it was all going by. It seemed a pity one couldn't bottle up some of the summer for use in winter. Of course, if you were an artist, you could. Landscape pictures are a kind of bottled-up summer; you can do a lot with them in winter, if you are quite alone, and try to believe very much. Say," she continues,

in her usual inconsequent fashion, "why is your wife so anxious that Mr. Duncombe should come back to the boat?"

She puts this question in an unconcerned manner, and with downcast eyes; in fact, she is now pretending to sketch, on the printed fly-leaf of a novel, some simulacrum of a withered tree on the other side of the stream, and the better to make her drawing visible across the advertisements, she from time to time moistens the lead-pencil with her lips, which is a most reprehensible practice.

"Is he one of the distresses you have suffered from, and would rather now be free from?" one asks, in a general kind of way.

"Certainly not. I liked him very well—I liked him very well indeed. But if he comes back now, it will be with a difference. Things have got altered somehow—don't you feel that? This hardly seems the same boat that used to lose itself in the middle of the Thames, with everybody trying different kinds of poles. Doesn't it feel a long time since then? And even since Mr. Duncombe left us? Why, that was only the other day, as you might call it; and yet it all seems cut off and distant somehow. I believe it was the tunnels did it."

"Did what?"

"Why, since we came through those tunnels, we seem to have come into another world altogether. Everything is different—the landscape is different——"

"Are the people different?"

"I don't know," she says reflectively; "but I seem to feel a different kind of atmosphere around us somehow. Don't you think it will sound odd to hear Mr. Duncombe, if he comes back, talking about theatres, and comedies, and magazine articles? The critics, too—they have been let alone for such a long time: I wonder if he will have any new grievance against them when he comes back. Yes, it will be different——"

One could perceive in a vague way what she meant, though her speech was not very precise.

"But don't you want to hear what has been going on in town—what new books are being talked about—and new plays?"

Miss Peggy lifts her eyes for a moment.

"Don't you think," she says, with a little hesitation, "that he is interested in rather small things? To write a comic piece for a theatre—that isn't a great ambition, is it?"

"It is a harmless one, surely."

"Oh, yes. You laugh at the moment, and

forget. But these are not the things that remain in the mind. Sometimes I almost wish that Colonel Cameron had not repeated that ballad of 'Gordon of Brackla'; if I happen to lie awake at night, it comes into my head—I seem to hear the very tones he used—and it makes me shiver; it is so terrible a story. And yet I am quite sure that the interpretation you and he put on it is wrong. I don't believe the wife taunted her husband, and sent him out to fight, with the notion that he would be killed, and that then she would marry the other one—'fierce Inveray.' I don't think that was it at all. I believe she was convinced that her husband could fight against any odds, and would return victorious. That was a great deal more likely—she was the wife of a man renowned for his bravery——”

“My dear young lady, that is a very charitable construction; but what are you to make of her conduct after her husband was slain?—

‘A bridegroom young Inveray stood by her side;
She feasted him there as she ne’er feasted lord,
Though the bluid o’ her husband was red on his sword.’ ”

“Ah, but that was to make sure!” says Miss Peggy, with a kind of proud air. “If

she had tried to defend the castle, Inveray would have burned it down, and killed her, and she would have lost her revenge. No; she had to pretend to make friends; and then there was a wedding; and in the middle of the feast she watched her chance—and stabbed him. That was the end of it—then or thereafter: I am certain.”

“And a very dramatic ending, too.”

“Well,” she continues, “I wish I dared ask Colonel Cameron to write out that ballad for me.”

“Dare! That is an odd kind of word. Why, he’ll be delighted.”

“Will you ask him for me?”

“Certainly not. Ask him for yourself. Do you think he will bite?”

“And why is he called Colonel?” she demands, with unreasoning petulance. “Why isn’t he a Major, or Captain, or General—I wouldn’t mind what it was—but Colonel——”

“You are a little too familiar with the title on your side of the water?”

“And you know how that is?” she says instantly. “No, you don’t. I can see you don’t. Well, I will tell you. You’re always calling me a schoolgirl, but there are lots of things I can teach you——”

“No doubt.”

“The reason we have so many Colonels in America,” she remarks, with an oracular air, “is simply this—that at the end of our war all the survivors were raised to that rank. That was what a grateful country did. That is what I call true gratitude. What they did with people above that rank, I don’t know; but all the rest were made Colonels. What do you do at the end of one of your wars?”

“We haven’t time to do anything before another has begun.”

“Then your soldiers get plenty of chances. Say, do you think I could get a copy of ‘Men of the Time’ over there in Tewkesbury?” asks this persistent questioner.

“You would be more likely to get it in Gloucester.”

“Is it an expensive book?”

“I don’t know; perhaps eight or ten shillings. But if you mean buying it, it is a bulky thing to carry about.”

“I could cut out the pages I want. I should like to see all that Colonel Cameron has done—a list of the engagements he has been in, because—because naturally it is interesting, when you are meeting anyone from

day to day—well, you want to know all about him.”

“And who told you that Sir Ewen Cameron was in ‘Men of the Time’?”

“Your wife. I was asking her what battles he had been in; and she said I ought to look there——”

“Why not ask himself?”

“Oh, I couldn’t—I couldn’t do that!” she exclaimed—and then she suddenly ceased, for at this moment the door was opened, and here was the tall, sandy-haired Colonel himself, looking very smart and fresh, and with a cheerful “Good-morning!” on his lips. Nor was Miss Peggy much confused; no—she frankly gave him her hand; and there was a smile on her face as she returned his greeting, and inquired if he had heard any tidings of breakfast.

We passed most of that morning in Tewkesbury—having got ashore and clambered up the steep, ruddy, slippery bank, and thence made our way into the town. We crossed the Avon—not running red with blood, as the chroniclers say it did after the memorable battle of some four hundred years ago, but running yellow in spate, with the recent heavy rains. And when we got into the quiet,

wide-streeted town, we saw further evidence of the floods that had visited the valley of the Severn; for along the pavements the people were busy pumping out the coffee-coloured water that had submerged their cellars and kitchens. Some of those old houses looked unstable enough already—their projecting upper storeys apparently like to topple down on the heads of the passers-by; but perhaps the people of Tewkesbury—which is built at the confluence of three rivers and several brooks—are used to this sapping of foundations. Queen Tita asked of her young friend to point out which of these ancient tenements was the scene of the murder of the young Prince Edward (they say his blood still stains the floor), but Miss Peggy answered that she had not been reading up her English history that morning; she had been imparting wisdom, she said.

And yet, when we had got along to the Abbey Church, and were within stone's throw of the Bloody Meadow, as the place is called to this day, she showed herself sufficiently interested. Mere recitals of battles and sieges she did not heed much; but a personal and dramatic incident could immediately enchain her attention, especially if it was connected

with anything she could actually see. Was it, then, to this very gateway now before her that the Abbot—interrupted in his celebration of the mass by the wild battle without—had come, bearing the Host in his hands, and forbidding Edward and his victorious followers to enter, until the King had sworn to spare the lives of the defeated Lancastrians, who had fled for safety into the sacred building? And was it up between these massive Norman pillars that the King and his soldiers and the monks marched to the high altar singing their thanks to Heaven for the great victory, while the slaughter of the fugitives was still going on outside the walls? Silent enough now was this solemn nave—our footfalls on the stone the only sound. And the good folk of Tewkesbury have got a race-course quite close to the Bloody Meadow—where the Avon and Severn join.

When we got back to the Nameless Barge, all available poles, spars, and oars were called into requisition, for now we had to cast her loose upon the wide and flooded river, in order to get her over to the tow-path side. But by dint of much indiscriminate paddling (we had neither rowlocks nor tholepins, and it was difficult to get a purchase on the water

from any part of the boat) we eventually got her across and under the bridge ; then we had the horse hitched to again ; and away we went down stream once more. It was a landscape-artist's day—bright, breezy, and change-ful ; with sudden bursts of sunlight touching here and there and widening out over field and grove ; the atmosphere singularly clear, and yet lending itself to tender hues of grey and lilac and silver in the far distance. Then this noble river seemed to grow more and more beautiful—when we had passed the town and the race-course, and were making rapid way southward. The country seemed to grow more and more rich and bountiful ; there were parks and woods and stately mansions ; and all these shining in this vivid light—indeed, there was one green slope, the elms on the summit of which threw almost black shadows, so keen was the glare. And then, again, a pale network of cloud would partially veil the sun ; and all the colours around us would grow quieter in tone, though they were none the less harmonious ; and when one looked at the yellow rippling river, the wooded banks, the lush green meadows, perhaps here or there a bit of a red roof peeping through the trees, perhaps the grey tower of a church

crowning some windy height—well, then, if we had found in a corner of this composition the signature *Alfred Parsons, pinxit*, we should hardly have been surprised.

We found the Severn a busy river, too ; and we had quite sufficient occupation in getting our awkward vessel past the successive strings of barges that were being brought up by steam-power against the flood—we having to keep outside of them, and get our tow-rope over their smoke stacks somehow or anyhow. But with Murdoch at the bow and Captain Columbus on the bank, we succeeded in getting by without any serious mishap. Help from the bargemen themselves we got none—not that they were in any way sulky or unwilling, but that the sight of this strange craft coming down the Severn awoke an all-conquering curiosity, and they could do nothing but stare at us until we had passed. Then we encountered a small steamer coming along at a considerable pace, that gave us a good bit of a wash ; but the Nameless Barge dipped and bobbed and rode out these billows quite as if she had been to the manner born ; and, altogether, we thought we were doing mighty fine. In this fashion we swung along by Chaseley Rye, and Deerhurst, and Turley ;

and then we halted for luncheon at Haw Bridge, there being a certain White Lion in the neighbourhood, where Captain Columbus proposed to bait our gallant steed.

“Well,” said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, pulling in her camp-stool to the table with much complacency, “we have got so far in safety, thank goodness. But I’m glad I’m not responsible. When the worst comes to the worst, I mean to simply sit still and be drowned. If we have had to come through so many scimmages on a quiet bit of an ordinary river——”

“Oh, pass those pickles and hold your tongue!” one had to say to her. “An ordinary river! I tell you it is a whirlpool, a cataract, a Niagara and Corrievreckan rolled into one. I tell you we have done very well. Why, we excited the admiration of every bargeman we passed. Didn’t you see how they were struck with astonishment at our skilful seamanship?”

“They were struck with astonishment at something,” she observed. “I suppose they never saw a house careering down the Severn before. But if we have all these escapades on this quiet part of the river, what is to happen to us when we get into the open estuary?”

"Don't you think you could have constructed a boat that would have saved you from all these apprehensions?" asked Sir Ewen Cameron, with cool impertinence. "I mean with something stronger along the sides, so that you wouldn't have to fear striking against the wall of a tunnel or bumping against one of those heavy barges?"

"Certainly," one made answer to this amateur critic. "She might have been armour-plated all round her gunwale, and she might have been furnished with a few twenty-ton guns, in case we should fall in with pirates."

"Or did you never think of taking one of those barges themselves and fitting it up?"

"Yes, with underground apartments, where we should all be living like moles, or water-rats rather."

"There might be skylights," said he.

"But, Sir Ewen," said Miss Peggy, "what would become of the charm of these picnic luncheons? As we are sitting now, each of those windows frames a landscape—why, you might consider the five windows five pictures hung up to adorn the walls. And then they are living pictures—real water and skies and trees."

He deferred to her at once.

“Oh, certainly, certainly,” said he. “When we are resting quiet like this, it is much more delightful to have the view all round us ; it is when we are going on that the awkwardness of having a top-heavy house on the boat comes in. Of course, you wouldn’t have all that trouble with the tow-rope if you went by steam. A small steam-launch—specially fitted to get into the canal-locks——”

“Oh, Sir Ewen !” Queen Tita exclaimed, “fancy having a noisy, rattling, smoky thing like that in those beautiful still solitudes we came through ! All the charm and fascination of the quiet would vanish at once. And think of the smell of the oil—and the throbbing of the engine——”

“Look here, Cameron,” one of us had to interpose, to put an end to this insensate discussion, “the political people think nothing of taking a Cabinet Minister who has just been War Secretary and putting him in command at the Admiralty ; but we can’t have anything of that kind here. We’re not going to have Aldershot dictate to us. Besides, man, do you think we didn’t debate and discuss all these and a hundred other proposals before we hit upon this compromise ? ”

“That seems a most excellent pigeon-pie—may I help myself?” he remarked to his hostess—and that was all his answer!

“And that reminds me,” said Mrs. Three-penny-bit, “that we ought to hear at Gloucester to-night whether Mr. Duncombe is coming. I am sure we owe a great deal to him for all the trouble he took about this boat. He was most indefatigable—you would have thought he was planning the whole expedition for himself.”

“Yes, Madam,” one said to her, “you ought to be most grateful to him. It’s all very well for you now—here you are in fine summer weather—windows open—beautiful scenery all around you—and so on. I can tell you it was a very different thing last January—up at Staines or Kingston—inspecting one melancholy house-boat after another—the ice crackling on the slippery gangboards, one’s teeth chattering with the cold. That was what Jack Duncombe did for you——”

“Yes, but we are not ungrateful, are we, Peggy?” she observed, making a bold appeal.

“I hope not,” the younger person answered.

“And I am only sorry he has not seen this beautiful Severn along with us. Perhaps the Kennet may make it up to him.”

She seemed very certain that Jack Duncombe would come back to the boat; and there was this to be said for her conviction that, if he could get away at all, he would assuredly try to join our party now, for he had always been curious to see how the craft he had helped to construct would behave in the open waters of the Severn. But we had no idea that we were to see him so soon. On this still golden evening we were quietly gliding on towards Gloucester, when Captain Columbus—who was far away along the tow-path (a favourite habit of his when he was not wanted on board)—was seen to stop and speak to a stranger.

“Fancy Columbus meeting an acquaintance in this out-of-the-way neighbourhood!” Queen Tita exclaimed. And then she looked—and looked again. “Why, I declare it is Mr. Duncombe! Isn’t it, Peggy? It must be!”

The waving of a pocket-handkerchief put the matter beyond doubt. And then, in the course of a few minutes, the Horse-Marine, recognising the situation, and observing a part of the bank where we could easily get alongside, stopped his horse; the bow of the Nameless Barge was quietly run in among the reeds

and bushes ; the gangboard shoved out ; and Jack Duncombe—in boating flannels, and with a small blue cap on his head—and yet nevertheless having a curious town look about him—at least so it seemed to us—stepped on board, and was cheerfully welcomed by the women-folk, and introduced to Colonel Cameron. Yes ; there was a town look about his complexion that one had hardly noticed before—somehow suggestive of cigarettes, and lemon-squash, and the scribbling of farces. But he was apparently in the brightest of spirits ; his clear, intelligent grey eyes showed how glad he was of this friendly welcome ; while the way he glanced round the boat seemed almost to imply a sense of ownership.

“And you didn’t get my telegram at Tewkesbury ? ” said he.

“We never thought of asking for telegrams,” Queen Tita made answer ; “we were too much engaged in watching the people pumping the water out of their houses.”

“Oh,” said he, “I thought you must have been washed away somewhere—I hardly ever expected to hear of you again. Did you see the newspapers ? No, I suppose not. Why, there was nothing but gales and storms and floods—many a time I wondered how you

liked the Forest of Arden in that kind of weather."

"I can assure you," said she, "we had nothing to complain of in the way of weather——"

"Ah, you are used to the West Highlands," he remarked in his off-hand way.

Well, now, if he had not been a new comer, and therefore to be welcomed, he might have been made to suffer for that imprudent speech; but she only said—

"There is Peggy, who has never been in the West Highlands—what do you say, Peggy?"

"I think it has been just beautiful and delightful, all the way through," that young lady said promptly. "We had some rain, of course, now and again; but we didn't seem to mind it. What I remember is just beautiful."

"And you got through the tunnels all right?"

"Oh, don't speak of that—that was too dreadful," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a shudder. "Thank goodness, we are to have no more of them! Nothing on earth would induce me to go through those horrible places again."

"I see you have suffered a little in the wars," he continued, glancing along the roof and the sides of the boat. "You'll have to lie up somewhere for repairs. Of course you must look very smart before you make your appearance in a gay and fashionable place like Bath."

"But wait a bit, my young friend," the steersman put in; "what's this you're saying about Bath? Is the Thames and Severn Canal blocked?"

"I have been making inquiries," answered this diligent youth, "since I came to Gloucester, and I rather fancy it is. However, I will get to know more to-night or to-morrow morning. But anyhow, why shouldn't you go down to Bristol? It will be ever so much better fun. I should like to see her go ploughing after a steam-launch."

"Thank you," said Queen Tita, with much dignity; "I, for one, have had enough of steam-launches."

"Oh, that was going through the tunnels," said he, with perfect good-humour; "whereas this will be in the open. There won't be any danger—not much, at all events. If she should begin to do anything we can howl to the people on board the steam-launch, and

they'll 'stop her, back her,' and pick us up. It's quite simple."

"It's quite simple," complained Miss Peggy, "to have all our things sunk in the middle of the Severn!"

"And if we are to be towed down by a steam-launch," Mrs. Threepenny-bit asked again, "what is to be done with the horse?"

"The Horse-Marine must take him on to Bristol by road," said he.

"By road?" she answered quickly, as if some new idea had suddenly occurred to her. "Peggy, don't you think you would like a little driving-trip?—we could get a landau that would take all the things we wanted to make sure of——"

But here our Colonel interfered at once.

"No, no," said he, "that will never do. There must be no deserters. If you will answer for the navigation of the ship, Mr. Duncombe, I will be responsible for the behaviour of the passengers."

"As for that," said Duncombe, "I don't mind being made answerable for anything; but I think it's a wholesome rule, when there is anything doubtful going to be done with a boat, to put the responsibility on the owner of her. He ought to be in charge——"

“And he’s going to be,” observed the person concerned. “Don’t you make any mistake about that.”

And yet the notion about driving seemed to linger in Mrs. Threepenny-bit’s small brain.

“Peggy,” she said, “what do you say about that landau?”

Miss Peggy glanced at Colonel Cameron—but instantly lowered her eyes, for he happened to be looking her way.

“Oh, no,” said she modestly, “the passengers must be obedient—we must all stay by the ship.”

In the clear evening skies there were long lines of faintly russet cloud—parallel they mostly were, as if they had been left there by some receding sea—when we came in sight of the square tower and four turrets of Gloucester Cathedral rising above the wide meadows, with a background of purple, low-lying hills beyond. And now the question was whether we should go on to the town and endeavour to get into the basin of the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal, or remain for the night out here in the rural quiet.

“And your luggage, Mr. Duncombe?” Queen Tita asked, for she knew that people

don't drop down from the clouds in a suit of boating flannels.

"Of course I took my things to a hotel," said he. "When I got your invitation, I knew I should be a fifth wheel to the coach—only it was too tempting—and then I said to myself that I could easily stop at a hotel whenever there was a chance——"

"You shall do nothing of the kind," said she—for she is a hospitable kind of creature in her way, "that is, if you will put up with the discomfort of a bed in the saloon——"

"And if you would take my berth, and give me the bed in the saloon," Colonel Cameron interposed, "then I know you'd hate me less——"

"Not at all," said the younger man, with a good-natured laugh. "I am the one who ought to apologise, for coming here to disturb a happy family. And to-night, to show you bear me no ill-will, you're all coming to dine with me at my hotel——"

"Mr. Duncombe!" his hostess protested. "This boat is provisioned for any length of time——"

"But the dinner is ordered," said he; "and the room; and I have got what you haven't got—some fresh flowers. So I suggest you

should leave the boat at some convenient place just outside the town, and we can walk up to the hotel. And then," continued this shifty young man, "you might put a few things in your dressing-bags—just now, I mean—and if you found you would rather stay the night at the hotel, you could send for them. It seems a pity to have to turn out late at night, and make your way down to the river."

"And how late do you expect us to remain your guests, Mr. Duncombe?" Mrs. Three-penny-bit inquired mildly.

"In Gloucester," said he, "no one ever goes to bed before twelve; but two is the fashionable hour."

"Then I am afraid we shall have to be very unfashionable. But come along, Peggy, and we will get some things ready—for no one knows how the time passes when men begin to smoke."

"They don't seem to know, anyway—that is their good fortune," remarked Miss Peggy; and forthwith these two disappeared.

And very gay this little dinner-party proved to be, when we were all assembled in the small sitting-room that Jack Duncombe had engaged; the table was bright and cheerful

with flowers and wax-candles; and the banquet a good deal more sumptuous than the modest repasts to which we were accustomed on board our boat. Perhaps, too, Queen Tita—if she were still cherishing certain dark designs—was pleased to observe that the young man's position as host gave him a certain importance; and enabled him to display all his best points of manners. One could not help imagining that Miss Peggy was eyeing him a little critically—though surely that brief absence could not have transformed him into a stranger.

But what puzzled one of us most was this—how was it that he, who had left us in a most perturbed and anxious frame of mind, should now on his return be in the blithest of moods? He declared that the invitation we had sent him had reached him at the most opportune moment; but that, if it had not reached him at all, he would have come uninvited, and begged to be taken on board as a day-passenger, shifting for himself at nights. So there was here no making up of any quarrel, or the removal of any misunderstanding. On the contrary, he conducted himself just as if he had come once more among old friends; and he was most anxious to please; he

brought with him all the gossip of the town ; and news of the larger world, too, which we had missed for many a day. And always, we noticed, our garrulous and vivacious host, when he had to address himself to Sir Ewen Cameron, did so with a certain deference which became the younger man very well ; and Inverfask—who acted the part mostly of a good-humoured listener—was very civil in return. Peggy also was a listener. The talk was chiefly kept up between Queen Tita and her young protégé, who was clearly in high favour to-night. And as for wandering away out in the dark to find the Nameless Barge, Jack Duncombe had already taken that matter into his own hands by ordering rooms for all of us in the hotel.

Yes, this was rather a festive evening—although Miss Peggy was without her banjo ; for a little later on, when cigars had been lit, Jack Duncombe—who had been educated in Germany—proposed to compound for us a bowl of Maitrank, as appropriate to the season of the year ; but Colonel Cameron offering instead to brew some Scotch toddy, as a much wholesomer mixture, Queen Tita unhesitatingly declared for the latter ; and whisky, hot water, sugar, lemons, and the like, were forth-

with sent for. It cannot honestly be said that our potations were deep; but the steaming odour of this unaccustomed beverage—here in this southern land—seemed to awaken memories; and very soon Mrs. Threepenny-bit was telling us of all her maddening difficulties as a housekeeper in far northern wilds—thirty-three mortal miles from any baker's or butcher's shop; while Sir Ewen came in with his experiences of shooting-lodges from the other point of view—that is to say, the point of view of a guest who has to take his chance. We did not sit up till two; no, nor yet to half-past twelve; but it was a merry evening.

And at the end of it, in her own room, Mrs. Threepenny-bit made these remarks:—

“Well, I am exceedingly glad Mr. Duncombe has come back; and I thought he showed to very great advantage to-night, didn't you? and Peggy has eyes—she must see. Of course, he was much too profuse with his entertainment—ridiculously so, for a young man; but I am hardly sorry. It would remind her of his circumstances.”

“And you think she was impressed by borrowed silver candlesticks, and fruit, and flowers? It seemed to me she was a good

deal more interested in hearing how we managed to live on blue hares and brown trout at Corrie-na-linnhe, that week the horse fell lame."

"As I said before," she continued, "I wouldn't for a moment compare Mr. Duncombe with Colonel Cameron. Certainly not. But in Mr. Duncombe's case, if her fancy was turned his way, everything would be most propitious and satisfactory; and we should have nothing to blame ourselves with. She must see that, too; she has as much common-sense as anyone. And I really do think that Mr. Duncombe showed to great advantage to-night."

"But, look here," one ventured to say to her, "even supposing that Peggy's fancy were to turn his way—either seriously or for mere devilment—are you quite so sure that Jack Duncombe would respond? All the time he was with us before he seemed impervious enough. Whatever else he is—and I think he is a well-intentioned young fellow, clever, too, and amusing in a half-cynical sort of way—there's not much sentiment about him. Mightn't your beloved Peggy find him rather a tough subject?"

She wheeled round at this.

“ Why, even as a piece of mischief, do you think if Peggy were setting her mind to it she couldn’t make a hash of him in half-a-dozen hours? She did it before; but she dropped it—he gave in too easily, and then she loses interest. If there were no more serious possibility with regard to Colonel Cameron, I should have no anxiety in the matter; but it isn’t her usual tricks this time; it is something entirely different—indeed, it is she herself who seems attracted and impressed, and that in a very curious sort of way. However, if any madness of the kind has got into her brain, the contrast between these two—as regards their age and their circumstances and all that—must certainly strike her. Even if she doesn’t take up with Mr. Duncombe—I am sure I don’t want her to take up with anybody, while she is under my care—still, the distraction of his being here will be useful and wholesome. And really he showed very well to-night.”

There was nothing further to be said. When the sacred oaks and the doves have spoken, the rest of the world is silent.

CHAPTER II.

“Eagerly once her gracious ken
Was turned upon the sons of men ;
But light the serious visage grew—
She looked, and smiled, and saw them through.

* * * * *

“Yet show her once, ye Heavenly Powers,
One of some worthier race than ours !
One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.

* * * * *

“And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry : *Long, long I've looked for thee !*”

THERE was much business to be got through on the following morning ; and we were rather glad to have the women-folk taken off our hands by Colonel Cameron, who volunteered to escort them on an exploration of the antiquities of Gloucester. They wanted to find out the beautiful old house in Westgate-street which is well known to artists and architects.

They wanted to visit the ruins of Llanthony Priory—probably with some vague idea that this was Landor's Llanthony. They wanted to see the great Cathedral and its monuments: perhaps, Queen Tita wistfully suggested, the choir might be singing. And so we beheld them go away; and blessed them; and betook ourselves to the offices of the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal.

Here we were received with much courtesy; and as a result of our inquiries we resolved not to attempt the navigation of the Stroud-water and Thames and Severn canals, but to go down the Severn to Bristol. The fact is, we had all the way through had a kind of sneaking wish to make this attempt, even supposing the other route were practicable; and we rather wished to be persuaded that it was Bristol we ought to make for. Accordingly we were furnished with letters of introduction to the authorities at Sharpness Point, who would advise us as to the best means of getting through the open waters; and being so equipped we had now but to bring the Nameless Barge along to the commodious basin, where were lying ships and steamers of every description and size. Captain Columbus performed this office with his usual business-like

self-confidence ; but Murdoch looked a little bit shy as the toy-boat came along. Beside these massive hulks—in the midst of all this bustle and activity—there is no doubt the Nameless Barge had the appearance of having been brought out of the window of a fancy repository. And so the idlers about seemed to think. They crowded down to the berth which we secured for her ; and stared, and examined, and discussed. No such craft had ever been in this place before, we were pretty sure of that. But then Murdoch had adroitly drawn together the small red curtains of the windows on the landward side ; and so, when Mrs. Threepenny-bit and her young American friend at length appeared, they escaped with ease from the curiosity of these good people into the security of the saloon, where they remained while we were getting the boat slowly and miscellaneously rowed and pushed and pulled past the great overtowering vessels to reach the mouth of the canal.

What kind of a day was it when we started ? Well, it was the kind of a day that keeps weather prophets, of a prudent turn, quiet. We might have rejoiced in this burning and brilliant sunlight that shone on the wide and riverlike waters, on the winding pathway,

and the hedges and woods and slopes ; but that all of these things derived much of their extraordinary vividness from the fact that behind them, in the south, were heavy masses of purple-black storm-cloud, forming an admirable but ominous background. We affected to ignore that louring distance. Here around us everything was perfect ; the air summer-like and sweet ; the smooth water mirroring the blue and white of the overhead sky ; the sunlight warm on Peggy's golden-brown hair. Moreover, there seemed to prevail a certain sensation of freedom and largeness as we got further and further along. This canal was of much greater size than those to which we had been accustomed ; and the craft we encountered were not the ordinary, long, slow-moving, silent boats, but sea-going vessels of all kinds, with life and briskness everywhere visible. Quite imposing was one stately procession of three brigantines, two schooners, a sloop, and two picturesquely-laden barges that glided quietly by, headed by a noisy little steamer. Indeed, as nearly all the traffic on this ship-canal is governed by steam-power, we had almost a monopoly of the tow-path, and so got along without trouble.

Mr. Jack Duncombe seemed very well pleased to be back among us; and was gay and talkative; his facetiousness chiefly taking the form of magnifying the possible dangers of that trip down the open Severn to which we were now definitely pledged. Perhaps he meant to show that this part of the expedition was as important as the passage of the tunnels, which he had missed; perhaps he was so sure of the sea-worthiness of the boat that he could afford to scoff; but in any case he entirely failed to terrify his hostess—if that was his aim.

“Oh, no,” said she, with decision, “whatever may happen to the rest of you, Peggy and I will be safe. I am not going to take the opinion of any of you gentlemen; I am going to take the opinion of a professional seaman; I am going to ask Murdoch whether we should make the venture. And if he is in any way doubtful, then there is the landau for Peggy and me; and you may as well keep an eye on us as we are driving along the road, for when we see you sinking we should like to wave a handkerchief, by way of good-bye. It isn’t for myself,” she continued placidly, “that I care so much; but I am responsible for Peggy. The United States

might do something awful to me if she was drowned while under my charge. They might summon me to the bar of the House of Representatives—I suppose they have a bar——”

“Trust them!” said Jack Duncombe, but we didn’t know what he meant.

“Then they’ll say, ‘Where is Margaret Rosslyn?’ ‘My lords and gentlemen’—I suppose this is what I shall have to say—‘please, she went down in a stupid old house-boat that tried to get along the Severn.’ ‘Away with her to the dungeons’—that’s what they’ll say to me—‘and feed her on iced water and canvas-back duck that haven’t been cooked.’ Oh, no; I’m not going to run any such risk. I will take Murdoch’s opinion; and if he is at all doubtful, then it’s a landau for Peggy and me—and we’ll watch you from a convenient distance.”

At this moment Miss Peggy came out into the sunlight: she had been adorning the saloon with the flowers that had done duty on the dinner-table at the hotel the night before. Moreover, she had made bold to appropriate to herself a few white hyacinths; and the little bouquet looked very well on her dress of dark blue serge.

"Come here, you American girl," Queen Tita says to her, and takes hold of her by the arm, and makes room for her by her side; "do you know that I am responsible for your safety?—and now that these people have determined to go down the Severn in this cockle-shell of a thing, the question is whether I am going to allow you to remain on board."

"I thought that was all settled!" observes Miss Peggy, rather appealing to Colonel Cameron.

"It is not all settled," Mrs. Threepenny-bit makes answer. "I will not permit of any foolhardiness; and unless I can be assured that there is not the slightest danger, you and I will put ourselves into a carriage and get down to Bristol on good solid land. And I am not going to take any vague assurances; I am going to have a professional opinion; I am going to consult Murdoch——"

"Oh, Murdoch?" says Miss Peggy, quickly.

"Yes; although he is a steward, he has been a sailor, too, all his life; and unless he thinks we may safely run the risk, then ashore we go."

"Oh, yes—very well—I agree to that," remarks Miss Peggy—and why should she again glance towards Sir Ewen Cameron—this

time with a kind of smile in her eyes? "I will hold myself bound by Murdoch's opinion—certainly."

"Why, Miss Rosslyn," Inverfask interposes, with a touch of reproach, "you promised to stay by the ship!"

"But I am not going to allow her to run into any danger," Queen Tita says in her peremptory fashion. "I have got to restore her safe and sound to the United States—and much good may they get out of such a piece of baggage!"

So on this brilliant and shining day (for we would rather not look at that black wall of cloud in the south) we got on by Rea Bridge and Quedgley and Hardwicke even unto Whitminster, where is the junction with the Stroudwater Canal. But we did not stay to make inquiries as to the practicability of getting back to the Thames by this route; we had signed our articles, as it were, and were bound for Bristol; the allurements of the Avon and the Kennet, among other considerations, had proved too potent. So we continued our placid voyage; and so fair and shining and beautiful was the country around us that we pretended not to know that a breeze had sprung up, and that those mighty masses of purple cloud were

advancing, heralded by a few rags and shreds of silvery white.

The storm burst while we were all inside and leisurely seated at lunch. It had been growing darker and darker for some time before ; but we had hardly noticed it ; for we were listening to Jack Duncombe's recital of his experiences on the production of his one and only piece, and our imaginations were away in the region of the lamp-lit Strand. But all of a sudden there was a sound that recalled us to our actual surroundings—a smart rattle as of buckshot on the forward window ; and then we became aware that the world without was steeped in an unusual and mysterious gloom. The next moment the tempest broke upon us with a roar—a continuous thunder of rain and hail and ice that battered on the roof, and hurled itself against the windows with an appalling fury. We could guess that the sudden gale was tearing the water around us into a white smoke ; but we could see nothing ; for the panes were steaming with the half-melted ice and hail-stones. Then, in the midst of all this bewilderment of noise, there was a sharper crack—as if a pistol had been fired just outside.

“ Why, what's that ? ” cried Jack Duncombe, jumping up and making forward.

“Here, don’t open that window!” one had to call to him. “Do you want to swamp the whole place? Leave the hurricane alone; it isn’t meddling with you.”

But what was this now? The Nameless Barge was going more slowly. Then it touched something—gently. Then it stopped altogether.

“I know what it is!” said that young man, triumphantly. “The tow-rope has broken, and Murdoch has run the boat alongside the bank.”

This seemed probable enough; but it was no reason why Queen Tita should exclaim “How provoking!” and one was called upon to rebuke that infinitesimal creature for her unreasonable impatience.

“Go on with your lunch,” one says to her, “and be quiet, and leave Murdoch and Captain Columbus to patch up the rope between them. ‘How provoking,’ indeed! Don’t you know that we have a Philosopher on board this boat? If you would only listen to her teaching, she would show you that, instead of grumbling over the tow-rope breaking now for the first time, you should be filled with joy because it did not break before. Don’t you remember the solemn warning —— gave

us before we started? ‘You are going to certain misery,’ he said, ‘if you propose to tow a house-boat all over England; for the tow-rope will be continually breaking, and the driver continually getting drunk.’ What has happened? The driver has never got drunk at all—the tow-rope now breaks for the first time. If you had any wisdom in you—if you would only listen to the teaching of the great Philosopher whom we have engaged for this voyage—you would rather rejoice that we had come all this way without any such mishap.”

“And who is the Philosopher?” she demands.

“Me,” says Peggy, abasing herself in bad grammar.

“And who authorised you to interfere with the affairs of this boat?”

“Please, I never did anything of the kind!”

“Ah, it’s just like him to trump up charges against innocent people. Mr. Duncombe, don’t you trouble; the men will make everything right. Come back to your place; we all want to hear how the battle-royal ended between you and the hysterical mamma.”

Well, the storm—or prolonged squall, rather—after bellowing about our ears as if it meant to blow us out of the water, ceased

about as suddenly as it had begun ; there was a burst of warm sunlight all around, insomuch that the forward window was thrown open, letting the mild, sweet air blow freely in ; and presently we became aware, from the motion of the boat, that the people on the bank had got the line mended and were again moving forward. We finished our luncheon in peace ; and Jack Duncombe came to an end of his adventures on that fateful night at the theatre.

When we went outside, we found a most tempestuous-looking scene around us. Far away in the west the Monmouthshire hills were still steeped in a sombre gloom ; but the hills in the east were swept by flying rain-clouds, followed by bursts of sunlight that produced a rainbow on the soft grey background. And if the colours of the landscape had been vivid before, they were now keener than ever in this dazzling radiance ; the very sedges and willows beside us were all shimmering in the silvery wet. There was a brisk breeze blowing, too—a stimulating sort of breeze, that seemed to suggest our fighting our way against it—as, indeed, we very soon were. For we found that the tow-path here offered excellent walking ; so we all got ashore ; Jack Duncombe and Queen Tita

leading the way—through this whirling and changing world of showers and flying clouds and sunlight.

“Colonel Cameron,” said Miss Peggy, with a certain demure air, “didn’t you say that the Highlanders were so courteous that usually they would try to answer you as they thought you wanted to be answered?”

“They have a tendency that way—and I don’t blame them. Why do you ask?” said he.

“Because I don’t think we shall have any need of a landau to-morrow.”

“I—I don’t quite understand,” said he.

“Didn’t you say there should be no deserters from the ship—when we go down to Bristol?” she asked, still with her eyes on the ground.

“Well, it would be a pity, wouldn’t it?” he answered her. “Why not see the thing through? You are not afraid, I know; and I understood you to say you meant to keep by the boat. Oh, yes; I distinctly think we should hang together——”

“Don’t you mean drown together?” she asked meekly.

“If it comes to that, yes. My own opinion is that there won’t be the slightest danger of any kind.”

“But you belong to the army ; whereas it is a naval expert who is to be called in,” Miss Peggy continued. “And—and I thought you looked a little surprised to-day when I consented to abide by his judgment. Then you had forgotten what you told me about the Highlanders ? ”

And still this tall, long-striding, sandy-moustached Colonel didn't perceive what she was driving at.

“I think I know what Murdoch's opinion will be,” she observed modestly.

And then he burst into a roar of laughter.

“Excellent, excellent ! You are going to tell him beforehand that you are anxious to remain in the boat ; and then you will ask him whether you should or not ? Very skilful—very ingenious ! ”

“Do you think so ? ” interposed the fifth of these pedestrians (all of them struggling forward against this fresh-blowing wind). “We will see about that. If there is to be a court of inquiry, there shall be no subornation of witnesses. Murdoch—if he is consulted at all, which is extremely improbable—will be asked to give a perfectly free and unbiassed judgment.”

“Murdoch is a friend of mine,” she said

darkly ; and that ended the matter for the moment.

Presently Queen Tita called aloud—

“Peggy, come along ! Here is something for you.”

These two ahead had come to a halt at a corner of the winding tow-path ; and when we overtook them we perceived the reason why. In the great valley now opening before them lay the wide bed of the Severn river—here and there showing long banks of yellow sand, and here and there narrower channels of lapping water of similar hue. Which was the main body of the stream we could hardly make out—water and sand seemed in many places to lose themselves in each other.

“Well ? ” said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, “doesn’t it remind you ? ”

“Of what ? ” asked Miss Peggy.

“Why, of the Missouri at Council Bluffs ! ” she exclaimed. “I thought you would see the likeness at once—those great mud-banks and the yellow water. I thought your loyal heart would leap up—that we should see tears of gladness in your eyes——”

“But I never saw the Missouri anywhere,” remarked Miss Peggy, innocently.

“What!—you never were at Omaha ? ”

“No, never.”

“Well, you are a pretty American——!”

“Yes; that’s just what she is,” one ventured to observe, merely by way of defending the poor thing.

“A pretty American you are! Never saw the Missouri! I wonder if you ever heard of the Capitol at Washington?”

“As for that,” rejoined Miss Peggy, “I know of somebody who has lived all her life in England, and never went to Stratford-on-Avon till the year before last.”

“I consider you a very impertinent young person,” said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with much dignity; and therewith she turned to her former companion, and they resumed their walk and talk.

But what was of more importance than any fancied likeness to the Missouri was the question whether that great extent of sand and yellow water gave us any indication of what we might expect further down; for, in that case, there seemed to be little to cause serious apprehension. Even with this brisk breeze blowing up against the stream, there was nothing of a sea on; and, as far as we could judge, the worst that might happen to us would be our grounding on a sandbank, which

would be annoying enough, but not necessarily dangerous. The steersman of the steam-launch would know the proper channel; and what could be simpler than to follow submissively in his wake? So we comforted ourselves; and Miss Peggy assured Colonel Cameron—there seemed to be an excellent understanding between these two—that she would easily manage Murdoch.

When at length we got down to Sharpness Docks we did not go into any of the great basins, but remained in one of the connecting water-ways, where we found a snug berth, and where there was a chain ferry-boat, by which we could cross to the other side when we wished. We left the women-folk to make themselves beautiful for dinner, and set out to prosecute inquiries. The evening was more placid now, and though there was still a stormy look about the western skies, we still hoped for a quiet day for our adventure of the morrow.

We very soon found, however, that the task of obtaining information was no easy one. For one thing, the Sharpness Docks extend over a wide area; and while it was next to impossible to explain to the people what nondescript kind of craft this was that we had brought along,

we could not encroach on their good-nature by asking them to leave their homes or duties to come and look at it—not that night, at least. But on one point we had absolute assurance; there was no steam-launch here available. There had been one quite recently; but it had left. Might there be one over at Lydney? Perhaps. If the worst came to the worst, we could telegraph to Bristol to have one sent up? Certainly. What would that cost? No one knew. They seemed to think it rather an insensate thing that we should have come hither with a boat that had neither steam nor sails, and that couldn't even be rowed; but our chief consideration was that we *were* here; and had no sort of intention of going back. When we returned to the Nameless Barge with our report (it was half-past eight by this time; the saloon was all lit up; and dinner waiting) Miss Peggy promptly said—

“But supposing you can't get any steam-launch, why shouldn't the boat be allowed to float down with the stream? I suppose she would hit upon the sand-banks here or there, but you could shove her off, and she would make her way herself. Isn't that practicable?”

“Oh, yes,” responded Jack Duncombe, at

once. "It is quite practicable. And it would be a gay performance at first, to go waltzing along like that. But it would be rather awkward lower down. Do you know that the Severn is about six miles wide down there? I dare say if we bobbed about for a month or two, we should eventually get blown into the mouth of the Avon."

"What do you say, Mr. Duncombe?" cried Queen Tita. "Six miles wide? Why, it's the open sea! And we are going out into it in a thing like *this*?"

"But think of the heroism of it!" said he. "Why, they will put up a statue to you in Bristol, as the first person who ever went down the Severn in a wooden shanty."

"The wooden shanty," said she, solemnly, "will take the form of a carriage on four wheels; and it will go along a sound, respectable, Christian highway. What do you say, Peggy?"

Miss Peggy glanced towards Colonel Cameron—who also was regarding her; but the entrance of Murdoch relieved her from the necessity of answering, and presently dinner was going forward.

And again this evening the young gentleman who had just returned to us maintained that

extraordinary vivacity which was in such marked contrast to the dolorous mood in which he had left us. Nay, he was nearly incurring his hostess's displeasure by his recklessness; for she, having remarked that it would be an interesting thing to know from people which historical character they most admired—or would themselves have chosen to be—he said instantly:

“I know who I should like to have been—the Earl of Rochester.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Oh,” said he, carelessly, “he had a merry time of it—he was drunk for five years at a stretch.”

“Colonel Cameron,” said she, with severe reserve, “I hope you will choose some respectable person.”

“I? Well, I really don't know,” Sir Ewen made answer. “I've always had a great admiration for the old northern warrior who was quite willing to be converted to Christianity until he happened to ask where his forefathers were: you know the story.”

“But I don't,” said Miss Peggy, in her usual prompt way.

“When the Bishop told him his forefathers were in hell, Radbod immediately drew back

from the font: where his forefathers were, there he would go. I forget the precise words; but it was rather a fine speech—don't you think so?"

The Chief Inquisitor turned to Miss Peggy.

"You, Peggy?"

The answer came without a moment's hesitation.

"I should like to have been Flora Macdonald," she said.

"But wait a bit, Miss Rosslyn," Jack Duncombe interposed. "Are you quite sure you can call Flora Macdonald a historical character?"

"Certainly," Colonel Cameron answered for her. "Undoubtedly. Miss Macdonald was flung into the Tower. Now, it is only historical characters that are 'flung' anywhere. Unmistakably she was a historical character."

"It is so strange to hear you speak of her as Miss Macdonald," said Miss Peggy, thoughtfully—though we did not quite perceive how this little peculiarity should have impressed her.

Now, it was not to this chance mention of Flora Macdonald, nor yet to any resuscitation of Jack Duncombe's Alfieri project, that we owed the reintroduction of the subject of

Prince Charles Edward—which had already played so important a part in the conduct of this expedition. Biscuits was the much more prosaic cause. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in her capacity of universal provider, had purchased for us some tins of oatmeal biscuits, for which she has a particular fancy; and when one of those was now produced and opened, there was some promiscuous talk about the qualities of oatmeal in general, which Mr. Duncombe seemed to regard as a merry topic. Inverfask, on the other hand, was saying that, if it were true that oatmeal was a non-fattening, bone-producing form of food, then it was strange that Prince Charlie, who must have lived on little else during most of his wanderings in the Highlands, should have thriven so well on it that when he escaped over to France his own brother hardly recognised him, so stout had he grown. So here we were back at the Young Chevalier again; and forthwith Mrs. Threepenny-bit said—with inadvertent encouragement—

“He was quite a slim young man when he landed in Scotland, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, tall and slim, but with a wiry and muscular figure, and with a most princely carriage—I think that must have helped him

greatly in winning over those poor Highlanders to his cause. And then," he continued (for was he not well aware of Miss Peggy's romantic interest in these matters?), "he had left nothing undone to fit him for the part he was to play. He did not want to come amongst the clansmen as a foreign Prince; he tried hard to make himself a Highlander; even before he landed he had trained himself in their athletic sports—the use of the broadsword as well; and then, when he was amongst them, he was indefatigable in interesting himself in their ways and family histories and traditions—and in picking up any old custom——"

"There was one of their old customs he managed to pick up," Jack Duncombe said, with a laugh; "he was a powerful potationist."

"Drinking was common among the gentlemen of the time," Cameron said briefly; "and there may have been an occasional bout or two—magnified afterwards by the people who took part in it. But Charles Edward was by nature and habit notoriously an abstemious young man. Why, do you think a person given to drink could have gone through such physical fatigue and endured such privations as he had to encounter? When he was

marching with his troops into England—on foot, as he always was, at the head of this or that regiment—talking to the men, and cheering them on—they weren't very sorry when something happened to his shoe, for then they got the pace moderated a little. Look at his endurance among the hills," Sir Ewen went on. "For nearly a whole week he lived on a quarter of a peck of oatmeal; and all the while sleeping in holes or caves, on the bare rock frequently. The whole party were actually starving when they chanced on the Glenmorriston men; and they brought the Glenmorriston men near to starvation too—until they managed to shoot a stag, and that they had to eat without bread or salt. I wonder if any King's son ever before had to suffer such hard discipline; very likely it may have been the plain living and the constant exercise that made him look so stout and well when he returned to France."

"Almost thou persuadest me that he was rather a fine fellow," Jack Duncombe said, quite good-humouredly. "But you can't get over the last years of his life."

"The last years of his life?" Colonel Cameron repeated. "Well, I know the story. And I don't like to recall it. They say that

his miseries and disappointments had turned his brain. Long before he went to Florence his conduct had become quite inexplicable : people couldn't even find out where he was. But surely, when a man's life-history is so far away from us as that, it is kinder and wiser to think of him at his best—— ”

“ Oh, surely—surely ! ” said Queen Tita—for that furious mite of a partisan had been listening in rather a breathless way.

“ It is not a great piece of charity to extend to anyone,” Sir Ewen continued—he knew these women-folk were on his side. “ And at his best young Charles Stuart was a brave and gallant Prince, eager, generous, and filled with enthusiasm in what he considered a just and loyal enterprise—that was to win the Crown of England, not for himself, but for his father. Aytoun says that if the clan-system of the Highlands was doomed, it was better it should go out in a blaze of romantic splendour rather than die merely of inanition. Well, that may be so. Yet I can't help remembering that many a poor Highlander had to pay dear for that brilliant historical episode ; and indeed I wish that Lochiel had taken Fassiefern's advice, and stayed away altogether, or else gone to meet the Prince with a firm and unalterable

‘No.’ But the thing was done; the misery and suffering are all forgotten now; and who, at this distance of time, can bear any grudge against Charles Edward, or want to think of him except in his best days? Why, we should rather be grateful to him for all the beautiful music and the pathetic songs that he called into existence. All the finer feeling of Scotland was awakened by his heroic undertaking—the poets themselves couldn’t keep from joining his standard. Miss Rosslyn, did you ever hear of the ‘Braes of Yarrow’?”

“Oh, yes,” the young lady answered, but in a startled way—her eyes had been absent.

“I don’t mean Wordsworth’s poems—I mean the older ballad—‘Busk ye, busk ye, my bonnie, bonnie bride.’ That was written by Hamilton of Bangour. Hamilton belonged to an old Ayrshire family, so that clanship feeling had nothing to do with him; a very accomplished person he was, a great favourite, and already making his way to fame; so that he had really everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by joining the Prince; but join the Prince he did. The fascination of the enterprise, I suppose, captivated his mind; I don’t know that he had ever met the Prince personally; perhaps he had at Edinburgh—at the

Holyrood festivals, when Bonnie Prince Charlie was winning the hearts of all the Scotch ladies——”

“Was Mr. Hamilton killed?” she asked quickly.

“Oh, no. He escaped to France, like so many more; and afterwards he was pardoned, and even got his estates back. The Government were as lenient as could fairly have been expected—though some examples had to be made. Well, I wish they had spared old Lord Balmerino,” he continued, in this careless, rambling way; “he was a splendid old fellow: however, if there was anyone who didn’t seem to mind, it was Balmerino himself. Then there was old Malcolm Macleod, who was guide to Prince Charlie in a great part of his wanderings; they ran no great risk in letting him off, though Malcolm was proud enough of the triumphant way in which he got back to his own country. When Miss Macdonald was set free, she was asked to choose an attendant to accompany her on her journey to the north; and she chose old Malcolm; so that he used ever after to say, ‘Well, I went up to London to be hanged—and came back in a braw post-chaise with Miss Flora Macdonald!’”

And how did Mrs. Threepenny-bit take all this talk about these half-forgotten things ; and how did she regard the keen and sympathetic interest that Miss Peggy so obviously displayed ? It is to be feared that, fiercely Jacobite as she was in her sympathies, she was beginning to wish Sir Ewen Cameron back at Aldershot—although it was herself who had insisted on his being summoned hither. To defend the Young Chevalier, and to give Miss Peggy some idea of what a Highland soldier may be like, was all very well ; but to capture the young lady's heart (supposing there was any such risk) as well as her imagination, was a very different matter. And again, on this evening, she gave utterance to her fears.

The occasion arose in this way. After dinner, Miss Peggy, drawing aside one of the blinds and peering out, discovered that it was a beautiful starlight night, and proposed that we should all go for a stroll along the bank. The captain of the ship, having to enter up the log, declined. Queen Tita also refused, affecting some dread of the night air. Jack Duncombe, of course, jumped up at once, and offered to be Miss Peggy's escort—which seemed a natural and simple arrangement.

But Miss Peggy hesitated. She glanced at Colonel Cameron.

"Sir Ewen," she said diffidently, "won't you come too? I am sure you will find it quite as pleasant to smoke your cigar outside."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, if I may," said he forthwith; and then she put a scarf round her head and shoulders, and these three went out of the saloon and made their way ashore in the clear dark.

The moment they had gone Queen Tita laid down the book she was pretending to read.

"Now, can you imagine anything more vexatious than the way that girl is going on!" she exclaimed—though one perhaps suspected that a good deal of her annoyance was assumed.

"You mean in asking Colonel Cameron to go out for a bit of a stroll?"

"Not at all. I mean her whole attitude towards him. And Peggy, of all people in the world! Why, she has always had a kind of scorn of men. She has always found them too pliable—too silly, in short; and has simply amused herself with them—that is, when she wasn't merely indifferent. But now she is as obedient as a lamb; and listens for every word

—and I must say that he talks almost entirely to her, openly and unblushingly; and it's 'Sir Ewen says this' and 'Sir Ewen says that,' as if he were the sole authority in the world. The bit of wood from Fassiefern House you would think she considered a sainted relic; and both of them talk of her visit to Inverfask as being something quite important—nothing in the shape of a call; and not one word has the minx to say about her going back to America. And the worst of it is, she has such a nerve: she is afraid of nothing; if she takes a thing into her head, she'll do it, whatever her people may say."

"But haven't you got Jack Duncombe here to alter all that?" one points out to this schemer.

"She doesn't seem to pay any heed to him!" she answers, rather blankly.

"Send Ewen Cameron away, then."

"I couldn't be rude to him," she says; and then she adds, in a hurt kind of fashion, "Rude—to *him*!"

"Very well; do as you please; but remember this, that if anything should happen through your having insisted on introducing Ewen Cameron to your dearly-beloved Peggy, all your romantic sentiment about Flora

Macdonald, and your sympathy for poor Prince Charlie, and the interest attaching to Malcolm Macleod and his post-chaise, and to the Glenmorriston men and their stag, and Hamilton of Bangour, and Holyrood, and Culloden, and Quatre Bras, to say nothing of bushels and sheaves of Jacobite ballads and songs—I tell you, all these things boiled together won't remove the last of the mortgages from the Inverfask estate."

CHAPTER III.

“And therewith cast I down mine eyes again,
Whereat I saw, walking under the tower,
Full secretly, now comen here to plain,
The fairest or the freshest younge flower
That e’er I saw, methought, before that hour :
For which sudden abate, anon astart
The blood of all my body to my heart.”

Now, as our good friend the Harbour-master was coming along to have a look at the Nameless Barge, it was not likely that the responsible people of the party were going to the ship’s steward to get his opinion of her seaworthiness ; but Queen Tita had a great faith in Murdoch ; and Miss Peggy knew it ; and on the first chance the young lady had—which was early the next morning—she set about beguiling and perverting the mind of that simple Highlander. Queen Tita was still in her cabin ; Jack Duncombe and the Colonel

had gone ashore for a stroll ; so there remained but one person to watch this young woman's wiles.

"Murdoch," said she, in her innocent fashion, as she was putting some flowers on the breakfast-table (none of them, the candid observer is compelled to own, half so fresh and bright and pleasant to look at as herself) ; "Murdoch, you know we are going down to Bristol?"

Murdoch lingered at the door of the saloon.

"Yes, Mem."

"And that the river is very wide down there?"

"Yes, Mem."

"You don't suppose there is any really serious risk, do you?" she asked in an off-hand way (and pretending to be very busy with the flowers).

But at this Murdoch hesitated. Did the young lady wish to be encouraged to go by water, or persuaded to go by land? Then perhaps it may have occurred to him that he might as well tell the simple truth.

"Well, Mem," said he, "I do not know myself; but there wass two or three o' them last night they were saying to me it wass not for five hunderd pounds they would go down

to Bristol in this boat, if there wass any kind of a preeze from the sous or sou'-west."

Here was a most unexpected blow—even Peggy was a little bit startled.

"What was that?" she said.

"Yes, Mem; that's what they were saying—not for five hunderd pounds would they go down the ruvver in this boat."

"It's the landau for you, Miss Peggy," one observed to her. But she was not to be easily turned from her purpose.

"Wait a bit. Murdoch, who were these men?"

"Oh! they were chist men from the docks," he answered.

"Yes; coalheavers and people like that, I suppose! What could they know about a boat like this?"

"Mebbe no mich," said the young Highlander, cautiously—for it was not clear to him as yet which way she wanted him to answer.

"Well," she said; "I wouldn't repeat a foolish speech like that, if I were you. Five hundred pounds!—a lot of babies talking nonsense! How can there be any danger? I don't see any possibility of it!"

And now here was his cue at last; and his answer was forthcoming readily.

“Dancher?” said he. “Oh, no, Mem; there will be no dancher at ahl—no, no, there will be no dancher whateffer!”

“You are quite convinced of that, Murdoch?” she said, dexterously pinning him to his expressed belief.

“Well, Mem,” said he, “the Severn is only a ruvver; and she wass on a ruvver before, and did ferry well; and she’ll do ferry well again.”

This sounded reasonable—though, to be sure, there are rivers and rivers. But Miss Peggy went on to tell him of the proposal that certain members of the party should go by land; and of her own decided opinion that we should all keep together; and in a way appealed to him to confirm her judgment.

“Why, it would be cowardly to leave the others, wouldn’t it?” she continued. “And I know—at least I’ve heard, Murdoch—that you never had any great liking for this boat; but you have seen what she can do; and she has never got us into trouble hitherto. So long as she keeps afloat, what more can we want? Why, I believe she would float well enough if she were on the open sea!”

“At sea, Mem!” said Murdoch, rather aghast.

“ Well, what would happen to her ? ” asked this bold student of nautical matters.

“ Pless me, Mem ! ” he exclaimed, “ if there wass any wind at ahl, she would roll about like a tib, and tek in watter, and then she would sunk—ay, in five minutes she would be down.”

“ Oh, she would roll about like a tub, and then sink ? ” observed Miss Peggy, thoughtfully. Then she said, in a lighter tone, “ Well, Murdoch, it is no use talking about impossibilities. We are only going down to Bristol—down a river, as you say—and it would be a great pity for any of us to leave the others, wouldn’t it ? ”

“ Oh, yes, Mem, a great peety ! ” said he.

“ And you know quite well there won’t be any danger,” she observed insidiously.

“ Oh, I do not think there will be any dancher at ahl ! ” he repeated.

“ And, Murdoch, I wouldn’t say a word about that foolish speech you heard last night,” she said, by way of closing the interview.

“ Ferry well, Mem,” Murdoch obediently answered ; and went about his duties.

You should have seen her face when he was gone—it was so serene and serious and ingenuous : it was only her eyes that spoke.

“ Well, of all—— ! ”

“ All what ? ” she asks, and there is hardly a smile in those tell-tale eyes.

“ To go and bewilder a poor Highland lad—— ”

“ Don’t you know this ? ” she says—interrupting in her usual unconcerned manner—“ that women are weak, helpless, defenceless creatures ; and that sometimes, when they have a particular aim in view, they have to use a little judicious skill ? But it is always done in innocence. Men, when they deceive, do it for dreadful purposes—crimes and villainies ; when women have to exercise a little tact, that is all done in pure innocence—— ”

“ Yes, a very simple, innocent young thing you are ! ”

“ Don’t you think I am ? ” she says calmly ; and she stalks across the saloon and takes her banjo off the peg, and sits down and begins twanging at the strings.

Then this is what one hears—

“ When de good ole Gabriel gwine to blow de horn,
You’d better be dar sure as you are born,
For he gwine to wake you early in de morn,
He’s a gwine to wake you early in de mornin’.”

Then, when she comes to the chorus, she sings alto—

“Den rise, children, sing around de door,
We’ll gadder early on de golden shore,
He’s a comin’ right now, an’ he’ll come no more,
He’s a gwine to meet us early in de mornin’.”

Then comes a brisker air—

“It’s early in de mornin’, before we see the sun,
‘Roll aboard dat cotton, and get back in a run!’
De Captain’s in a hurry; I know what he means;
Wants to beat de Sherlock, down to New Orleans.”

This, also, has a chorus, which she sings with much complacency (and all for her own enjoyment, apparently)—

“Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Roll out, heave dat cotton,
Ain’t got long to stay!”

“Now what on earth is all this frightful noise about?” demands Mrs. Threepenny-bit, suddenly appearing at the door of the saloon.
“And at this time of the morning, too!”

“Well, it isn’t Sunday morning,” the young lady makes answer. “Besides, he has been saying very rude things about me; and I’ve taken refuge in music; but it’s no use; and I’m sick and tired of everybody; and this is a hateful world; and I’m going to leave it——”

“Better not be in a hurry, Miss Peggy,”

one feels bound to say to her in friendly counsel ; “ you might change it for a worse.”

“ Well, now, that is a nice civil sort of speech to make to anybody—before breakfast—when one’s nervous system isn’t prepared for shocks,” said she ; but she was paying most attention to her banjo. Her fingers wandered into another air—

“ O my darling Nelly Gray, they are taking thee away,
And I’ll never see my darling Nelly more——”

she sang, in soft and tragic tones ; and there is no saying how far she might have got with that interesting ballad, but that there was a sound without—the sound of Sir Ewen Cameron’s voice in conversation with Jack Duncombe. Instantly she sprang to her feet, whipped the banjo into its case, and hung that up ; Queen Tita laughed in her quiet way, but said nothing ; and therewithal appeared at the door of the saloon the tall figure of the Highland Colonel, who had managed to get, somewhere or other, two large handfuls of lilac-blossom, both white and purple, that made a most welcome and fragrant addition to Miss Peggy’s table-flowers.

Alas ! we very soon discovered that it was not on this day, at all events, that we could make any attempt to get down the Severn.

When we emerged from our snug retreat, and set out for the scattered hamlet of Sharpness, we found there was half-a-gale blowing briskly up from the W.S.W.; and that all the various craft in the basins were stayed there, wind-bound. It was a very beautiful morning, no doubt; silver and purple clouds came rolling up through a sapphire-blue sky; the view across the wide waters of the river was striking enough—the yellow waves white-tipped with foam and rushing along the various channels; and the sunlight—after the passing glooms—was extraordinarily vivid on the ruddy banks above the Severn shore and on the green hills beyond. But this brilliant, breezy, almost bewildering day was a landscape-artist's day; it was not a day for taking an unwieldy house-boat down an estuary.

The Harbour-Master at Sharpness was exceedingly kind to us; and was good enough to come along and inspect the Nameless Barge. In the end he gave it as his opinion that, if we could get a small steamer to tow her down, and had the luck of ordinary quiet weather, we ought to have no great trouble or risk. Then the question arose as to where we should get a steam-launch. Such things don't seem to abound in the West of England;

those we could gain any tidings of were all engaged. When we had telegraphed here, there, and everywhere—and in vain—it began to dawn upon us that the mere possibility of danger in getting down the Severn was not the only difficulty we had to face. Supposing we should not be allowed to make the attempt? As this blowy, sunlit morning wore on, hour after hour, matters became more and more serious. It is true, we had plenty to occupy us in the intervals of waiting for answers to our telegrams; for docks and harbours are always interesting; and you may suppose that Miss Peggy was highly pleased to come across a vessel—a full-rigged ship it was—hailing from San Francisco; and that she stood opposite it a very long time indeed, examining it with a kind of loving minuteness, and guessing that the one or two people on deck were countrymen of her own.

Luncheon-time arrives, and we are still in this unpleasant quandary.

“It will be horribly ignominious to be turned back, after we have got so far,” Queen Tita says, in sorrowing tones. “And then where could we make for? I remember some very pretty districts farther north—we see them from the London and North-Western Line

every time we go to Scotland—and these have a canal winding through them ; but then, to get to them, I suppose we should have to face those horrible tunnels again—— ”

“ You may put that idea out of your small head,” one informs her. “ We are not going back at all ; we are going forward. Even if this blessed boat has to be put on a waggon, and taken down by road, it’s Bristol she has got to get to—somehow.”

“ And that would be practicable enough,” says Jack Duncombe. “ You could get a lorry, and have her fixed on that.”

“ And we could live on board all the same ? ” asks Miss Peggy.

“ Yes, and be taken for a company of maniacs ! ” her hostess says scornfully ; and then she continues : “ How was it no one foresaw this difficulty ? ”

“ Well, considering that the whole expedition was an experiment, how was any part of it to be foreseen ? ”

“ And what are our chances now ? ” she demands.

“ Our chances now are reduced to one. There is in this flourishing community a general dealer, who owns a share in a steam-launch—I believe that is how the matter

stands—which steam-launch is now at Bristol. Very well: he thinks she is hired till the end of next week, and in that case she is of no use to us; but he has telegraphed to inquire, and we shall have the answer in due course. If that last chance fails, then there is nothing for it but to lift this boat out of the water, and give her a cruise on wheels.”

“Then ye’ll take the high road and I’ll take the low road; but I’ll be in Bristol before ye,” she observes, in a flippant manner. One could almost imagine that she is secretly rejoicing over the probability of her escape from that water-journey.

“In the meantime,” one says to her, “we are going along to have a look at the Severn Railway Bridge, and to inspect the machinery of the Swing-bridge over the ship-canal. And as we shall have to climb to the top of the tower by an outside ladder of iron, overhanging the river, I suppose you giddy young things won’t care to come with us. A person who shut her eyes all the time she was going up the Righi railway——”

“That’s what I did when I was lowered to the whirlpool below Niagara Falls,” Miss Peggy confessed artlessly.

“Then I take it you won’t be for climbing

up this outside ladder—even if we put a rope round your waist and give you a friendly haul? ”

Queen Tita answered that she was not going to turn acrobat at her time of life ; and Miss Peggy pleaded that she had some correspondence to attend to—a sufficient excuse ; so the rest of us left these two to their own devices, and set out for the great railway-bridge that here spans the Severn from shore to shore.

Well, it was a way of passing the time while these fateful inquiries were being made for us at Bristol ; and Jack Duncombe, who knew a little about machinery (as about everything else in this mortal world), had undertaken to be our instructor and guide. And even the most ignorant person could not but view with interest the swinging portion of the bridge—a structure weighing of itself about four hundred tons—that revolves on a massive pivot of stonework. Open, it permits of vessels of any size passing along the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal ; shut, it connects itself with the railway crossing the main bridge over the wide river, the junction being so perfect as to be almost imperceptible. Why is it, in looking at the elaborate precautions and safeguards necessary to a construction of this sort, that

the mind will morbidly dwell on the possibility of their breaking down? One could not but think of some dark night—a mistake in the signalling—the swing-bridge left open—the long train coming thundering along—and then a confused hurling crash into a black chasm. The iron horse is still a monster in the imagination of many; it has not yet become wholly familiar; it is a devourer of human life more fierce than any dragon.

Then we climbed up an outside iron ladder to the signalling-house at the top of the tower (a performance not to be recommended to nervous persons) and gained a small projecting balcony, and were admitted. Instruction was the order of the day. Did we not understand that no accident *was* possible—seeing that a certain indicator severed the telegraphic communication, so that the persons in charge could not signal a train to come along unless the bridge was closed and locked? Well, machinery is a mystery to most folk; but here, anyway, was a spacious and picturesque view of the wide Severn valley—the rippling channels and yellow sand-beds, the ruddy banks crowned with foliage, the far green hills stretching back into Monmouthshire. And away in the south were wider waters, whither we were

bound. From this peak in Darien these shifting shallows seemed safe enough; might not one—as Miss Peggy had suggested—make the venture of gliding down with the tide, and scrambling along somehow, in the event of no other aid being offered us? At all events, we were not going to turn back.

Suddenly Colonel Cameron, who had wandered out on to the small platform overlooking this great height, uttered a brief exclamation.

“I say,” he called out to us, “isn’t that Miss Rosslyn?”

And sure enough it was Miss Rosslyn—away down there—and all by herself—idly strolling along the banks of the canal. Who could mistake the proud and yet leisurely carriage—to say nothing of the glimmer of her golden-brown hair? Nay, of a surety it was Miss Rosslyn; for she looked up as she passed, and waved her hand by way of recognition, and then went on again.

“Look here,” he continued quickly, “you get the engineers to open the bridge. I will go down and overtake her, and ask her to wait; it will interest her to see this great thing moving.”

“What?” one said to him. “Open the Severn railway-bridge to please that brat of

an American? Supposing a train were to come along?"

"Why, you don't understand what they've just been telling you!" he exclaimed. "A train *can't* come along. When the bridge opens the telegraphic communication ceases. Besides there's no train due. You get them to do it; I'm off."

So he departed; and after a while one could see him striding rapidly along the banks of the canal, where he soon overtook Miss Rosslyn. Nor did he seem to have much difficulty in persuading her; she turned at once; in a short time these two were right down below us, and looking up.

And certainly it was a curious thing to see this long section of a railway separate itself from the rest of the line, and begin slowly to revolve on its pivot of masonry, until at length, when it became motionless, it was at right angles with the main bridge, and parallel with the canal. Then again it began to move and slowly swung back into its former place, the great iron wedges lifting it on to the stone piers and making the junction complete. It was a pretty toy to put in motion for the amusement of an American Miss; and we hoped she was properly grateful.

But when we descended from these aerial heights, we found that it was not the opening of the Severn railway-bridge that Miss Peggy had in her mind; she was the bearer of a message.

"I thought I'd come along and tell you," she said, "Murdoch was over at the general dealer's shop; and they said they had got an answer to their telegram. They can't let you have the steam-launch; it's hired till the end of next week."

"You seem to consider that rather an amusing piece of news!"

"Yes," said she, simply; "for now we'll have to do something desperate."

"Perhaps you would kindly tell us what?"

But here Sir Ewen Cameron interferes.

"Well," he says, "I wouldn't be beaten—I would take that boat down by water somehow. Sending her by road would be ignominious. Why, I'd rather get a gang of men and haul her along as we used to haul the boats on the Upper Nile. I see by the map there is a sea-wall or a sea-bank nearly all the way down to Bristol. Or why don't you try to row her?—you could put a rowlock on each gunwale astern, and one on each gunwale forward——"

"We should have a high old rowlocking

time of it," says Duncombe, with insolent irrelevance.

"Or why don't you get a raft made, and float it down, as we do on our rivers?" puts in the American person. "Then the boat couldn't get hurt."

"Or why don't you put her on the deck of an outward-bound ship," suggests our facetious young man, "and drop her overboard when you get near the mouth of the Avon?"

"Oh, yes; you've plenty of mighty fine contrivances this afternoon," one says to the ribald crew. "Don't you think we'd better get a couple of balloons, stem and stern, and take her down by air?"

"As you are a Scotchman, you should say Doon by Ayr," Mr. Duncombe is good enough to observe: was there ever such a clever, merry, vivacious dog? But a rope's end would have made that dog skip.

"Well, come away, Miss Peggy," one says to the young lady—who does *not* seem as disappointed as one could have wished. "We'll go back to the boat and get to know what Columbus thinks of this predicament. When the heavy troubles of life fall on you it isn't clowns and pantaloons you want to consult."

"I foresee," she placidly remarks, as we set

out together, "that something wild is going to happen now. You can't send the boat down by road, as Colonel Cameron says it would be too ignominious. So she must go by water; and there's no visible means; therefore something frantic and awful is about to happen. But mind, we are all to keep together."

"Certainly."

"There's to be no landau."

"Perish the landau!"

"Well," she says, with great equanimity, "this is what I like: this is going to be charming." And that, at least, was so far satisfactory. It argued a cheerful frame of mind that she should look forward so confidently to the absolutely unknown.

And yet she proved to be a bit of a prophetess; for it turned out that we were to make a wild attempt to get down by water, after all; and there was to be no division of the party. Hardly had we got back to the Nameless Barge when our excellent friend the Harbour-Master appeared, to whom we disclosed our grievous straits; and then he informed us he had heard of a pilot-boat that was to leave early next morning for Lundy Island. Seeing that a steam-launch of any

kind was not procurable, why not induce these pilots, for a consideration, to tow us down? Had we an anchor and chain?—yes, we had. Then, at some convenient point off the mouth of the Avon, the pilots would cast us loose; we could anchor there, and take our chance of some rowing-boat or sailing-boat coming out to guide us into the river and up to Bristol. It must be confessed that there was an element of vagueness about the proposition; but by this time we were grown desperate. Besides, was not Miss Peggy rather looking forward to something strange, uncertain, and even fearful? So, upon consideration, we asked where the pilots were to be found; and the Harbour-master was then good enough to say that, if the ladies were inclined for a bit of a country walk on this pleasant afternoon, he would himself show us the way to the little village—a few miles inland—where we should most probably find one or other of them. So we accepted this good-natured offer; and all of us set forth.

What the name of that village was is now immaterial; but at all events the road thither took us through a most charming stretch of landscape—all glowing in the golden light of the afternoon. Very English-looking this bit of country was: the small, irregular fields;

the luxuriant hedges and wide ditches; the short, sturdy, wide-spreading oaks; the lush grass in the meadows; and then here or there a small straggling hamlet, the picturesque cottages half-hidden among laburnum and lilac trees, now hanging in blossom of yellow, and purple, and white. Nor was there much of the monotony of a highway; our guide seemed well acquainted with the short cuts; and we skirted woods, or got over stiles, or followed smooth-worn pathways in blind obedience to his lead—glad of the sweet air and the golden light and the quiet country sounds. At first the party had moved forward in an amorphous and changeable fashion; but gradually we had dropped into two and two; Jack Duncombe and our amiable guide leading the way; and Colonel Cameron—with much coolness—taking possession of Peggy. Queen Tita was regarding these two—who were somewhat ahead—when she said, rather wistfully—

“I can imagine Peggy looking very well on the platform at a Highland gathering. Just think of it—her tall figure—I think she would hold her own in appearance—I can fancy her giving away the prizes—Peggy would look very well, wouldn't she?”

“And that is what things are making for, is

it?" one asks; for clearly, in this mental picture of hers, the person who is giving away the prizes is Lady Cameron of Inverfask House.

"I don't know," she says, almost sadly. "It seems so. I am sure I am innocent in the matter—innocent of any intention, at least. But I know what they will say of us over there——"

"Has it ever occurred to your small mind that it may not much matter what they say of us over there, or over here, or over anywhere else?"

"How will they understand," she continues absently, "that their daughter may be Lady Cameron of Inverfask and yet have to be economical in her housekeeping? And I suppose it is only dollars they care for—that is the aim and end of life—I mean among the set that her people belong to. Oh, I don't quarrel with them for wishing her to marry well; but it's little they know what she is if they think that luxury or position or display is at all a necessity for her. Peggy is a little finer than *that*. Well, there's one thing they will not be able to say—I mean, if this thing should happen—and that is, that he married *her* for money."

“ Why, you talk about them as if they were a pair of indigent paupers ! If Cameron has to economise, it is chiefly with a view to getting the debts cleared off his estate—a most proper pride ; and you may depend on it that Peggy would understand the situation clearly enough. And do you think she is likely to pay much heed to what anyone may expect of her ? She seems capable of judging for herself—at least, what is quite certain is that she will judge for herself. You’d much better take it the other way, and consider that she will not be so very badly off, after all. If she won’t have a house in Mayfair, and be able to give a series of balls all through the London season, at least she’ll have her own piper to march up and down outside the dining-room window at Inverfask, playing ‘Lochiel’s Away to France,’ or ‘The 79th’s Farewell to Gibraltar.’ If she won’t be overburdened with diamonds, she’ll have plenty of poor folk on her hands, who will look up to her as a kind of goddess. Dollars ? No ; she won’t have millions of dollars, but she’ll have one of the gentle Camerons for her husband ; and she will belong to a great historical family ; and she will be the mistress of an old historical house ; and her position altogether will be one

not wholly to be despised. If marriage is to be a bargain, she won't get so much the worst of it. What does she bring?—a pretty face and a great deal of impertinence——”

“Oh, don't say that about my Peggy!” she says piteously (though she says it often enough herself). “Just look at her now—did you ever see anything more lovely than her hair, where it catches the warm light? And the way she walks—it isn't grace so much, as life, and ease, and perfect health that it suggests—she never seems to be conscious of a single movement—she is all eagerness, and interest, and delight—I think I feel a little happier every time I look at her.”

“So she is to make her first appearance on any platform in order to give away prizes at a Highland gathering—is that it? Well, yes; I daresay her appearance won't be against her. And she is a sharp young woman—I should imagine she wouldn't be long in finding out how to make herself popular among these people in the north. I shouldn't wonder, when Hector Maclean, and Donald Roy, and Alister MacAlister, and all the rest of them, came forward for their prizes, I should not wonder if her leddyship had a word or two of Gaelic for them, to send them away

proud and pleased. She has made a poor helpless object of Murdoch; and Captain Columbus is just daft to do her any small service."

"But, supposing they *don't* go to Inverfask," she says. "And supposing he were ordered out to India, or China, or some such place?"

"Then Peggy would become a grass-widow; and you could ask her to come and live with us: that would be very nice."

"Yes—for you," she says.

"But not for you?"

"Oh, well, I can bear with Peggy," she has to confess, "so long as there are no men about to bother her. But I do hope all this is a false alarm. I can hardly believe it possible—of Peggy, of all people in the world! And there is Mr. Duncombe; he seems quite to accede; he doesn't try to win any of her attention——"

"What? He makes bad jokes by the dozen, and tells stories of theatres, and curses critics, and tunes her banjo: what more can you want?"

"But she pays no heed to him!" this small creature protests. "If I were a young man, I should not like to be snuffed out like that."

She used to be glad enough to have him to go on with. But now—oh, dear, no!—she would rather hear about the ball at the Inverness Meeting—and the number of salmon Lord Lovat took out of the Beauly in a single week—and all that kind of thing——”

This conversation came abruptly to an end; for we were now arrived at the little hamlet, whatever its name was; and as our guide stopped at a certain cottage the ranks of this straggling party closed up. Soon we were in negotiation with a tall, modest-mannered, slim young man whom we understood to be part owner of the pilot-boat; terms were easily arranged; and we undertook to be ready to start between three and four on the following morning, so as to catch the turn of the tide. Thereafter there was another leisurely walk homeward—for we had come to consider the boat a kind of home by this time—through the still golden evening; but it was not Sir Ewen Cameron who was Miss Peggy's companion on the return journey; it was his hostess with whom he now walked; what their talk was about one could not say.

Poor little Mrs. Threepenny-bit!—it seemed to be some kind of consolation to her in her distress that, if her fears proved to be true,

Peggy would look rather well in her new position. That night (there was no sitting up late, in view of our early start on the morrow) if the small imaginative person dreamed dreams, it is as likely as not that they were all about a great crowd of spectators assembled in some wide meadow in the far northern Highlands; in the open space kilted competitors putting the stone, tossing the caber, playing the pipes, and what not; subsequently, the various winners coming forward to the platform, cap in hand, to receive their prizes from a tall young lady, somewhat benign of aspect, and with honestly smiling eyes, who possibly may have a friendly word for each of them. And this tall young lady (perhaps, just by way of loyalty to her clan, wearing a bit of ribbon of the Cameron tartan round her throat) is—as any of those people around would tell you—no other than her leddyship of Inverfask.

CHAPTER IV.

“Where lies the land to which yon Ship must go?
Festively she puts forth in trim array;
As vigorous as a lark at break of day:
Is she for tropic sun or polar snow?
What boots the inquiry?—Neither friend nor foe
She cares for; let her travel where she may,
She finds familiar names, a beaten way
Ever before her, and a wind to blow.
Yet still I ask, what haven is her mark?
And, almost as it was when ships were rare,
(From time to time, like pilgrims, here and there
(Crossing the waters) doubt, and something dark,
Of the old sea some reverential fear,
Is with me at thy farewell, joyous bark!”

At half-past two, on this perfectly calm morning, there are a few stars still visible in the western skies—faint-trembling points of silver in the deep-hued violet vault; but away in the east there is a pale, mysterious light that appears to tell of the coming dawn; while just over a serrated ridge of jet-black trees hangs

the thin sickle of the moon, orange-hued, and sending down on the smooth surface of the water a long line of gold, broken here or there by some accidental ripple. The birds are already singing in the strange twilight; and their shrill carolling seems to belong to some other and distant sphere; for the great world around us lies dark and dumb and dead. When Murdoch comes out, he speaks in undertones (it had been arranged we were to try to get the boat along to the basin without awakening any of the people on board) and when Columbus appears at the water-side, he looks like a ghost approaching through the transparent, bewildering, phantasmal gloom.

Then in the prevailing silence we stealthily release the Nameless Barge from her moorings; and with brief paddlings of oars and poles get her over to the other side, where the towpath is. There Murdoch and Columbus go ashore, taking with them the end of the line attached to the bow; and forthwith we are noiselessly gliding along through the smooth waters of the canal, towards the great gates that are to let us forth into the Severn.

Presently, the door opposite the steersman

is opened with an exceeding quietness; the figure of a tall young lady becomes visible, clad in a long dressing-gown, and with some soft white thing flung around her head and neck and shoulders; then, as carefully and gently the door is shut again.

"I haven't wakened anyone," she says, in an apologetic whisper.

"You'd much better go back to bed; you can't have had more than three hours' sleep."

"I haven't had any," she says. "I was too excited. I was lying awake, watching the stars; and then I thought I felt the boat moving; and I guessed you had begun. I'm not in your way, am I?"

"Certainly not; but it will be a tedious business getting through the locks."

"Oh! but it is ever so much nicer to be out here. And what a strangely beautiful morning it is!" she says, looking all around her.

Indeed she is almost justified in calling it morning now; for those trees close by are no longer quite black—some shadowy suggestion of green is traceable on the long shelving branches; the stars in the west have disappeared, and the skies there have grown

from a deep violet to a pale, ethereal lilac ; while in the eastern heavens the faint, wan glow has become radiant and clear: the herald of the new day, on some far hill-top, is blowing his silver bugle to awaken the sleeping valleys. She regards all this, for some time, in silence. Then one hears her repeat—almost to herself—the beginning of the old ballad—

“Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,
He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day’s dawning,”

though what fancy she has in her mind it is hard to say. She turns from her musings—

“Have you many mornings like this in those wonderful places in the north?” she asks rather wistfully.

“You will find still stranger things—seasons in which there is no night at all. You can sit on deck and read till midnight, if you like ; only it is much nicer not to read ; but to have some amiable young creature play and sing ballads for you ; or you can walk up and down and listen to the sea-birds. No night at all ; the sunset merely glides into the sunrise ; and you have a new day around you before you know where you are.”

“But,” she says, “when you have been in such beautiful places, don’t you feel it to be

just dreadful to come back and live in a town?"

"Not at all. It is the contrast that tells. Perhaps, if you lived there always, you might become too familiar with it; you might lose the fine touch of things that wonder gives you. The first wild primrose you come upon in the spring has an extraordinary fascination and interest; but if there were spring and summer all the year round—none of the deadness of winter—where would be the surprise and delight?"

"Well," she says, after a little while—and her eyes are fixed on that light in the east, that is momentarily becoming more clear and silvery and wonderful, "there are things that could never grow familiar. Daybreak is one. There is always mystery about it. It is like coming to life again, after death. You have been away, you don't know where; and you come back to the world; and when you find it as it is now—belonging almost to yourself, all the other people as good as out of it—it is very strange. No; I'm not afraid of becoming too familiar with beautiful things. Besides, the halcyon times you talk about don't last for ever. You have the stormy weather coming on; rain and gales; then you are

shut up a prisoner in the house ; and when you can go out again—when the sunlight and splendid weather come again—you have all the delight of novelty and surprise, just as much as if you had gone to live in some grimy old town.”

She seemed inclined to continue talking, in this hushed way, about those northern scenes that had aroused her curiosity ; but we were now arrived at the lock-gates, and business had to be attended to. All that one could hear of Miss Peggy was an occasional snatch of the ballad that seemed to be running through her head—

“ There rode wi’ fierce Inveray thirty and three ;
And nane wi the Gordon save his brother and he ;
Twa gallanter Gordons did never sword draw,
But against three and thirty, wae’s me ! what were twa ? ”

At length we got down to the great basin, where all manner of craft were lying ready to sail with the turn of the tide ; and there modestly took up our position by the side of some of the smaller vessels. There was as yet no symptom of life anywhere ; but the objects round about us were now clearly defined ; and colours had become visible—the red of the steep, high bank, the warm yellow-green of the hanging foliage, and the resplendent

saffron of the eastern skies, against which the tall interposing masts were of intensest black.

Suddenly there was a harsh croak overhead, and a whirr as if a hundred sky-rockets had simultaneously hurtled through the air.

"What's that?" Miss Peggy exclaimed—startled out of the low tones in which she had been talking.

"Look, Mem, look!" said Murdoch, who was standing on the quay. "It's a string of wild geese—look!" And away the great birds went swinging over to the western seas.

But towards four o'clock it began to be apparent that there was some human life on board these various craft. Here and there a thin blue line of smoke would rise from the stove-pipe into the motionless air; here and there an ancient mariner would appear on deck, rubbing his eyes, and looking all round the heavens for a sign. Soon, indeed, there was plenty of animation. Gradually the crews tumbled up and began to hoist sail—a picturesque occupation in this early morning glow; and presently the ringing music of the topsail halyards told us they were looking forward to a quiet slipping down the stream.

Bustle and activity prevailed everywhere ; men on deck calling to men on shore ; hawsers being passed over our heads ; on the smaller craft long sweeps being got ready. In the midst of this general uproar it is hardly to be wondered at that the rest of the people on board the Nameless Barge should speedily make their appearance.

“ Here’s a pretty hullaballoo ! ” says Queen Tita, looking all around her at the picturesque clusters of boats, with their tall spars and ruddy sails. “ Well, we are going to have sufficient company. If anything goes wrong, there will be plenty of people ready to pick us up.”

“ Don’t be too sure of that,” one says to her. “ When once we get started, you’ll soon find out how a smart-sailing pilot-boat will draw away from these lumbering craft. That is, if we get any wind at all. At present there isn’t a breath. Now, will anyone explain how we are to be towed down to Bristol in a dead calm ? ”

“ And you—you American girl,” she says, turning to Miss Peggy, “ what have you been about ? When did you steal out of that cabin ? ”

“ About half-past two, I believe,” answers

Miss Rosslyn, with an air of calm superiority. "*I have seen it all from the beginning.*"

"I don't know how it is," continues Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "but you two are always up first on board this boat. What is it? A wakeful conscience?"

"It is not," answers Miss Peggy, promptly. "It is simply the necessity of looking after this valuable craft. Of course, if you choose to lie in your berth till all hours of the day, you must have somebody to manage things for you. And there's no sloth about me. I am always willing to sacrifice myself for the general good."

"Yes; but I want to know what your share was?—what did you manage?" says the other.

"I kept my weather-eye open," Miss Peggy answers enigmatically.

"No doubt you did!—I'll be bound you did! And so this is what you call all hours of the day, is it, when it is hardly four o'clock? I know this, that I wish Murdoch could get us a cup of tea."

"You'll have to leave Murdoch alone," one says to her. "There are all these vessels beginning to slip out; and Murdoch will be wanted at the bow, until we get attached to

the pilot-boat. Indeed, he'd better stop there all the way down; so there will be little breakfast for you for some hours to come. Why don't you go inside and bring out some soda-water and biscuits?"

"Well," she says, with much good-nature, "people who make long voyages into distant lands have to put up with many things. But soda-water and biscuits—it's a gruesome breakfast!"

"I'm going to hunt out some beer, if I may," said Jack Duncombe, forthwith.

"I think," said Colonel Cameron, "if you will let me advise, that an egg beaten up in a glass of sherry would be a good deal wholesomer for you ladies at this time of the morning—and if you are not going to have breakfast for some hours——"

But here Miss Peggy interposed.

"An egg—and sherry?" she said. "Why shouldn't we have egg-nog at once? Let's all have some egg-nog—and you may drink to the Fourth of July or not just as you please. And do you think I do not know how to make it? Oh, but I do. And I know that Murdoch has all the materials; and I know where he keeps them; so come along and get out the glasses."

Accordingly these greedy people crowded into Murdoch's pantry, where one could hear them hauling things about, with a great deal of unseemly jesting. At the same time, when the Transatlantic beverage was at length produced, one could not but confess that it was extremely grateful and comforting at this early hour of the morning; and the Daughter of the Republic received our general thanks. Not that she came back at this moment. Oh, no; nor for some time thereafter. When she did return to us, we could perceive that she had seized the occasion to get rid of her haphazard costume (which was all very well in the mysterious light preceding the dawn), and now wore her suit of blue serge. She had done up her hair, too; and was altogether looking very smart and fine and neat.

Meanwhile we had attached ourselves to the pilot-boat, and were now lying out in the open—in the midst of a dead calm—and with a scene of singular beauty all around us. Here was no longer any river with twisting channels and bare sandbanks, but a vast lakelike expanse of yellow water, quite smooth save for the rippling of the tide; and that rippling declared itself in a series of sharp flashes of turquoise blue, the colour of the

overhead sky. On this pale golden plain the various craft—already widely separated—lay with their grey or brown or russet sails idly swaying or entirely motionless; the various tints and hues warmed into loveliness by the light streaming over from the gates of the morn. For by this time the sun was actually risen; and his rays shot across the great Severn valley, glorifying all the wide plain of waters, and shining along the wood-crowned, low-lying, green hills in the west.

Of course we regarded with some little curiosity our friends in the boat to which we were attached; and found them to be far away indeed from the old-fashioned type of pilot. They were quite elegant young men, and smartly-dressed; in fact, if it hadn't been that they showed something of a seafaring complexion, and that one or two of them were plainly solacing themselves with the chewing of tobacco, they might have been taken for a party of city clerks setting forth for a day's pleasure-sailing. Though very little sailing there was for anybody. For a little while there was a light puff of wind coming over from the east—the merest cat's-paw, just sufficient to fill the sails; but presently that died away; we were in a dead calm

again; and so they on board the pilot-boat took to the sweeps, and began to work at these. We crept along in a kind of way, but very slowly—opposite the green hills and farms of Lydney and its neighbourhood.

“And where is all the danger that was talked about?” said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as bold as a very lion (perhaps the egg-nog had something to do with her fearlessness).

“Where, indeed!” said the steersman.

“Besides, we are in open daylight,” she continued. “The darkness was the hateful thing about those tunnels. Now, if anything happens, we shall see what it is; and those young men could stop in a moment and help us. Why, this seems to be about the quietest and safest part of the whole trip!”

Oh, yes, it was all very pleasant—the sweet air of the morning, the smooth-lapping water, the sun shining along the ruddy banks and the green woods and fields, and our slow floating down with the tide. One was almost for withdrawing Murdoch from his post forward and sending him to get breakfast ready, but that now and again one’s nostrils seemed to perceive some faint indication of a change of wind—or rather of a coming wind—while as

yet there was nothing to stir the sails. And very shortly thereafter, indeed, the sails did stir—and quietly fell over and filled; then the sweeps were taken in; and presently we found ourselves being towed through these yellow waters in quite a joyous fashion. Even with this lumbering weight behind her, the pilot-boat gradually drew away from all her rivals; the young men who looked like clerks had no trouble at all in not only keeping the lead but increasing it—beating against the ever-freshening south-westerly breeze with a shiftiness and judgment that were very pleasant to watch from this old tub of ours. Of course we had nothing to do but follow accurately in their wake, and avoid the temptation of making little short cuts when they put about; and as the wind was getting brisker and brisker—and blowing up against the current—it was quite a new and delightful experience to chase this flyer through the now rising sea.

And now Miss Peggy separates herself from these associates of hers in the stern-sheets—steps on to the steering-thwart—catches hold of the iron rod by both hands—and places her chin on these as if she was bent merely on gazing away over the waste of waters we

are leaving behind, and towards the distant shores.

"I say," she observes, in a remarkably low voice, "isn't this what Murdoch calls a 'sous' wind?"

"South-westerly, I should say."

She smiles a little (the others cannot see her face).

"That was the wind those men at the docks spoke of," she remarks.

"What then?"

"I was thinking of the five hundred pounds," she says demurely.

"Five hundred fiddlesticks! She is walking the water like a thing of life. Don't you feel how beautifully she goes?"

"Yes, but is she going to do it any more?" she asks.

"Do what?"

"Why, jump about like this."

"It isn't jumping about. I tell you it's the minuet in 'Ariadne' she's doing."

"Is the water going to be any rougher?"

"If this wind keeps up it certainly will be."

"Oh, my gracious!" she says, in accents of dismay, and one understands at once what she is afraid of.

"Now listen to words of wisdom: if you

want to induce sea-sickness, you're doing your best at present—standing up here in that spread-eagle fashion. But if you wish to guard against it—I mean, if the water should get really rough further down—you just ask Colonel Cameron or Mr. Duncombe to go into the saloon and get out a tin of cold tongue and some biscuits and a bottle of champagne. Begin with a bit of biscuit. Then take a sip of champagne. Then some cold tongue and biscuit. Then some more champagne. Keep on as long as you can at the cold tongue and champagne; and then go and get a footstool, and cuddle yourself up in that corner there, and sit perfectly still: do you understand?”

“But I should feel just horrid asking for those things for myself,” she protests. “Will your wife join me, do you think?”

“Join you in eating some cold tongue and biscuit? My dear young friend, she would eat you, or the boat, or anybody, or anything, rather than run the risk of being sea-sick.”

“Well, I'm not going to give in just yet, at any rate,” she says; and she maintains her position on the steering-thwart; only she turns round now to face the pleasant breeze.

We were getting plenty of sailing for our

money, but making little progress, owing to the perpetual tacking. Jack Duncombe and the Colonel were between them trying to make out by the chart the whereabouts of Sheperdine Sands and Norwood Rocks and Whinstone Rocks; but the high tide rendered this difficult, and we could only guess at the distance we had come. At all events we had left the other vessels a long way behind; we could see them still sawing and sawing across that yellow plain, in the teeth of the still freshening wind.

But when, in course of time, we got still further down, we could better make out our position. There, unmistakably, was the mouth of the Wye, with the long spit running out, and ending in a conspicuous watch-house. Clearly we were getting on. And so far the Nameless Barge had behaved herself admirably; if our young friends in the pilot-boat may have been tempted to smile when they saw her bobbing up and down in their wake—like a fat old donkey being dragged along by a thoroughbred—they were polite enough to conceal their merriment. We never pretended that good looks were our strong point. What we wanted was to get down to Bristol; and we rather congratulated

ourselves on having got so far in safety. If there yet lay ahead of us a certain channel or series of channels called "The Shoots," of which the Sharpness people had spoken in somewhat solemn tones——But who was afraid? Even Mrs. Threepenny-bit professed rather to like this sawing and sawing across; and nobody was so ill-natured as to draw attention to the fact that all the southern horizon was now grown dark, as if there was a stiffish bit of a storm brewing down there.

But what the Sharpness people had been warning us about we were by-and-by to discover. "The Shoots," as they are called, are formed by the sudden contraction of the Severn estuary between Northwich and Port-skewet (at New Passage, that is), and consist of a series of races and whirlpools not unlike those in the neighbourhood of Corrievrechan — over by the Corra Islands and the Dorus Môr. When we found these currents strong enough to grip the pilot-boat by the bows and yaw her about, it is to be imagined that our poor old Noah's-ark—lumbering up in the rear—had anything but a "daisy time" of it. Moreover, the water became more and more lumpy—what with the swirling currents themselves, and the breeze blowing against the

tide ; the Nameless Barge began to forsake her heavy gambollings for all kinds of mystical and unexpected gyrations ; and again and again ominous noises told of catastrophes within. With that, of course, no one cared to concern himself ; the saloon and cabins and pantry might mix themselves up, if they chose ; they might make of the whole inside of the ship an elongated dice-box : it was what was happening out here that claimed our attention. And so we fought our way—with such rolling, and pitching, and springing, and curvetting as is quite indescribable—down through the Shoots ; until, as the morning went by, we gained what looked like a very good imitation of the open sea, where the pilot-boat began to lengthen out her tacks.

It was now blowing hard ; and looking very dirty in the south ; and one of us, at least, began to wish that the two women could be transferred to the other boat. The pilots themselves (who had lowered their topsail some time ago) no longer seemed to regard this performance as a joke ; they kept an eye on our unwieldy craft, as she plunged through the heavily-running sea. Indeed, it was almost ludicrous to watch this misshapen thing dipping her nose in the water, and

springing forward again, and dashing the foam from her bows just as if she were a real yacht ; and the only question was how long she was likely to keep up the pretence by remaining afloat.

Presently a new and startling discovery was made. As there was no calculating what time we should get to Bristol, with this head-wind driving against us, the steersman desired Jack Duncombe to go inside and bring forth a handful of biscuits ; and the young man cheerfully obeyed. The next instant he came out again—without any biscuits.

“I say,” he exclaimed, with a curious expression of face, “this blessed boat is full of water !”

In a moment—from the look of the women—he perceived the mistake he had made.

“Oh, no ; not that,” he protested, “but a little water has come in, and it’s slopping all about the floor of the saloon. Here, you’d better let me take the tiller for a minute, and you can go and look for yourself.”

Of course we all of us instantly made for the door of the saloon ; and there a most unpleasant spectacle met our eyes ; for if there was not as yet much water visible, it was washing from side to side as the vessel lurched ; and, of

course, no one could tell at what rate the leakage was coming in.

“Is she going to sink?” said Miss Peggy, rather breathlessly: it was Sir Ewen Cameron she addressed.

“I won’t stay another moment in this boat,” Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaimed. “You must call to the pilots—tell them to stop and take us on board——”

“Oh, be quiet!” one had to say to her. “This is nothing of a leakage—it only means that there’s nowhere for the water to go to. Don’t you understand that all the space below the flooring was filled up with that old iron so as to let her get underneath the bridges?—and this water is merely coming in at some of the dried seams—or, perhaps, at the bull’s-eyes——”

“And how fast is it coming in?” she asked.

“How can anybody tell? We’ll have to wait and watch. Or rather, Columbus must come inside and watch; and if the water should begin to rise in any quantity, then we may have to get on board the pilot-boat; that’s all. It isn’t doing any harm—it’s only washing the floor——”

Here a violent pitch of the boat flung us all together; and then we could see through the

forward window her bows shaking off a great mass of foam.

“Do you see that now? She isn’t used to dipping her nose like that; and, of course, there must be sun-dried seams on the bit of deck up there. Or, it may be, those bull’s-eyes have got a little loose——”

Well, it has to be conceded to Colonel Cameron that he was the only one who cared to wet his ankles in order to make an examination. He boldly splashed through the lurching water, and got to the further end of the saloon, and, stooping down, strove to reach with his long arm the circular pieces of glass set in the bows of the boat. But neither there nor anywhere else could we find out the source of the leakage; and when Captain Columbus was summoned from his post and shown the state of affairs it was generally agreed that the water must be coming in through defective seams, and that, if it did not pour in any faster than it seemed to be doing at present, we should manage to get to our anchorage in safety. Nevertheless, Columbus was directed to remain in the saloon, and furnished with a bucket and a bailing-can, to amuse himself withal.

But now these long tacks were telling; and

we hoped that we should ere long be getting under shelter of a certain dark spur of land running out there in the south. And none too soon either. We had not bargained for this squally weather when we started in the morning, and we knew well enough that this top-heavy boat was not at all fitted for the open sea. Of course we were glad that she was doing so well ; and the reports from the saloon informed us that the water was not rapidly increasing ; but we were perfectly aware that, if a heavier wave than usual should happen to strike her broadside on, she was just as likely as not to “turn turtle.” For one thing we kept all the doors and windows of the house part rigorously closed, so that no sudden gust could get hold of her that way ; the other alternative—to open them all and let the wind blow freely through—did not recommend itself.

So our gallant convoy continued to cut her way through those swift-running seas like a racer ; and we laboriously plunged, and rolled, and struggled after. It must be said for the women that they were very brave over it ; after that first fright about the water in the saloon, they had hardly a word to say ; they merely looked on in silence—sitting close to each other. And now that long dark spur of land

—Portishead Point, was it called?—was drawing sensibly nearer. The shipping that was gradually becoming visible no doubt marked the whereabouts of the King, or King's, Road; and that, we knew, was just off the mouth of the Avon. Then the sea grew a little calmer. Captain Columbus was provided with a huge sponge to help him in his bailing. We could hear Murdoch at the bow calling to his brother mariners ahead of him—asking for instructions, most probably. And at length and at last, the connecting hawser was shipped, and we parted company; the pilots put out a small boat, and our tall, modest-eyed young friend came on board to be paid; and when we had settled accounts, and when he had shaken hands with each one of us (there is somehow always a touch of the pathetic in a sailor's farewell), we found ourselves at anchor in a comparatively smooth sheet of yellow water, and near to a Dutch-looking line of coast, the topmasts of vessels, or here and there a little glimmer of distant landscape, appearing above steep banks of mud.

“Now, Miss Peggy, you and I expect to be waited upon by the whole of this ship's crew and passengers. We have been on duty since half-past two, and now it is ten.

If that isn't working for one's breakfast, what is ? "

"I'm sure I'm hungry enough," said Miss Peggy, sadly ; and Queen Tita was so touched with compassion that she herself began to get the table ready, while Murdoch was in the pantry, busy with ham and eggs and tea.

Now, we had just finished breakfast, and had gone out again to have a look at our surroundings, when we were approached by a wherry containing three men, who offered, for a consideration, to tow us up to Bristol. Truth compels the admission that these three sailors of Bristol city were about the most villainous-looking set of scoundrels one had ever clapped eyes on ; and experience proved that they were capable of acting up to their looks. But still, getting to Bristol was the main thing ; we agreed to their exorbitant terms, gave them a line, and away they went, we following.

Soon we had entered the river Avon, which is probably rather a pretty river at full tide, but was now, at low water, showing long mud-banks that were far from attractive. As we got further inland, however, we passed through beautiful woods, now almost in full summer foliage ; and, whatever had become of the storm we had seen gathering in the south,

there were clear blue skies overhead, and a warm sunlight filling the river valley. The three pirates, we observed, drank hard all the way, having replenished their huge keg at a place called Pill. It was none of our business, of course; we were idly speculating as to which would probably murder which before nightfall; and we came to the conclusion that it did not greatly matter—so long as there was a reasonable likelihood that one or other of them would get his notice to quit.

The first trick they played us was to stop at a stone slip not far from Clifton Suspension Bridge, intimating that they had fulfilled their contract, and wanted to be paid. Unthinkingly we gave them the money, only to find out that there was no tow-path here, and that we were stuck fast. Then Guzzling Jack and Gorging Jimmy for a further consideration offered to pull us on another stage—into Bristol city proper; and to that we, being helpless, agreed. At the second stoppage we were somewhat cheered by the sight of the Horse-Marine and his four-footed companion, who were awaiting us. Moreover, there was here a tow-path—at least, there was the common street; but it was so far away from the river edge that there was some difficulty

in getting the boat along ; whereupon the pirates, observing our quandary, again offered us their help, and volunteered to pull us into the Floating Harbour—for yet another sovereign. We gazed upon these men in silence ; and had no answer for them. Forthwith they became pertinacious. Then we curtly bade them begone ; and even told them (the women-folk being within) whither we wished them to go. But then again—when Columbus informed us that he and Murdoch could get the Nameless Barge along to the docks by themselves, and suggested that we might as well go ashore now, and that he would bring our things to the hotel later on—it occurred to us that we were once more dependent on those sailors of Bristol. So we airily and goodnaturedly pointed out to them that they might do us the favour of taking us ashore—a few yards distance—in their boat ; and this they did ; but they claimed a shilling a head for the service ; and then were dissatisfied, and sulkily demanded drink. We parted with them more in sorrow than in anger—for the contemplation of such deeps of depravity is painful. And even that, as will hereafter be related, was not our last experience of the three Bristol pirates.

As we were leisurely getting along to our hotel on the College Green, Colonel Cameron hung back a little, allowing Jack Duncombe to go on with the women-folk.

“Look here, my friend,” said Inverfask, in something of an undertone, “now it’s all over, I suppose you ought to be congratulated on having come down the Severn in a house-boat, and in the face of half-a-gale of wind. Well, you’ve done it—successfully—for once. But, if I were you, *I wouldn’t try it again.*”

CHAPTER V.

“Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around,
Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,
And glittering towns, and gilded streams, till all
The stretching landscape into smoke decays!”

NEXT morning is a Sunday—calm and clear and still; a placid sunlight falls on the trees in the College Green, on the pavements, and the closed shop-windows; a soft sound of church bells fills all the tranquil air. And then, when our women-folk, accompanied by Colonel Cameron, have gone away to the Cathedral, a kind of hush falls over this great hotel; the spacious rooms look preternaturally empty; one wonders when Jack Duncombe will have finished his letter-writing, and be ready to set forth on a hunt for the whereabouts of the Nameless Barge.

Presently he comes along into the hall.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting,” he says, as he lights a cigar at the top of the steps.

"Fact is, I had rather an important letter to write. Do you know ——?" he asks, naming the editor of a well-known evening paper.

"Not personally."

"I chanced to meet him at dinner the very night before I came down to you. We sate next each other, and got on very well. I found he was an eager trout-fisher — most likely taken to it late in life and anxious to make up for lost time; and that he was going down to Derbyshire this summer; so I thought I couldn't do better than tell him that if he was anywhere near my father's place I would see he had the fishing on our preserved water—for we've never anybody down there in June. That seemed to fetch him a little, I think. Then we talked about journalism; and he had seen one or two small things of mine—in *The Londoner*, and elsewhere; and when I told him I was coming down to you, he said, 'Why, what a chance for you to get a lot of miscellaneous reviewing done. If you like, I will send you down a parcel of books—for short notices only—and it will be no trouble to you to look through them as you are sailing along. It will help you to pass the time.' You needn't imagine

I refused—for a small beginning is better than nothing: and I had to write down where I expected to be in a few days' time: not that I counted too much on it, for I thought it was merely after-dinner good-nature on his part. However, I fancy Derbyshire must have stuck in his mind; for this morning there comes a letter saying the books have been sent off—so, I suppose, I ought to get them the first thing to-morrow."

Here one pauses—as we are passing along these sunlit Bristol streets—to regard him: is there any outward sign of transformation?

"So this is the end of all your rage and contempt and abuse? You've become a critic yourself?"

"Oh, well," he says, with the coolest effrontery, "the critics of books and plays and pictures don't do much harm. They don't, indeed. They're all contradicting each other; and the public see that and judge for themselves. The public are the final judge. No," he continues (and really this Short-noticer is beginning to talk with an air of authority); "the critics who do positive harm are the critics of life—the writers who from day to day and from week to week pour out morbid and distorting and belittling opinions about

human nature and human affairs. I suppose, now, the ordinary Englishman never reflects that he spends nearly all his leisure time in the society of journalists. They are his companions—whether he is travelling in a railway-carriage, or toasting his toes before the dining-room fire. It is their views of things that he unconsciously adopts. When he goes into his club of an afternoon, he nods to this acquaintance or to that; but he seldom stops to consult them about things in general; he passes into the reading-room, and takes up an evening paper, and listens to what it has to say about every subject in the known world. And who is it he is actually listening to?" the young man goes on—as we make our way down and across the bridge, where there are numerous groups of idlers on this quiet Sunday morning. "Of course, it may chance to be some quite sensible and well-informed person; but as likely as not it is some literary fellow whose nerves have all gone to bits, or whose liver has got all wrong. Or it may be some poor creature of a woman disappointed of a husband, or, worse still, with a husband gone to the bad, whom she has to support. And of course the literary fellow can't take a healthy and wholesome view of anything—a cheap

sort of cynicism comes most natural to him, or a still more hopeless pessimism; and the woman is morose and bitter; and so, between them, they present you with a very charming picture of what is going on in the world. We are all of us hypocrites, and worse. Statesmen make a pretence of caring for their country; but we know better; place—salary—that is their aim. Literature, art, and science are cultivated merely for the money they can produce. Married women drink in secret. Married men, when they can afford it, keep a seraglio. Girls are eager to sell themselves in the marriage-market to the highest bidder. Even children only pretend to like Christmas—they see through the sham sentiment, the affected merry-making. And so on—you know the kind of thing. To be disgusted with everything—to believe in nothing—that's the cue. Well, now," he continues, with much cheerful complacency, "in my Utopia I am going to have my journalists trained. They are the modern teachers and preachers; they must be brought up to have a healthy sympathy with all forms of human activity. Cricket and football of great importance. They must ride, and shoot, and skate, and play lawn-tennis. Then they must travel,

and learn how people live in other countries; they must talk at least three modern languages; they must visit every part of the British Empire, to see for themselves how so great a structure is maintained——”

“Yes,” one says to him, “all that is very excellent. But have you the slightest notion where we are likely to find Captain Columbus?”

“Ah,” he says, with some disappointment, “you have no regard for the welfare of your native country.”

“I thought it was Utopia you were talking about. And that is a long way away. Whereas this Floating Harbour—here at hand—is quite enough of a conundrum; and we are bound to find the boat before we go back.”

“If the pirates haven’t boarded her and run away with her,” he says, as we continue our patient trudge along the almost deserted quays.

But after long hunting we at length discovered the Nameless Barge, in a kind of *cul-de-sac*, lying outside some empty coal-boats; and, having clambered over these and got on board, we found Murdoch in sole possession, Columbus and the Horse-Marine having gone off to visit the town.

“Well, Murdoch,” one naturally inquired,

"I suppose you saw nothing more of those rascals yesterday?"

"Indeed yes, Sir," Murdoch answered with a grin. "They came back to the boat."

"What for?"

"Well, Sir, they said you had telled them they were to come and get a bottle of champagne."

"You didn't give it to them, surely?"

"Not me, Sir! I chist telled them they were liars, and to go aweh."

"And then?"

"Well, then, Sir, they threepit* and better threepit; and I said I would not give them a bottle of champagne, or a bottle of anything else; and I wass thinking one o' them wass for coming into the boat, so I took up an oar." Here Murdoch grinned again. "Oh, ay, Sir, they sah I was ready."

"Ready for what? For his coming on board?"

"Chist that, Sir. If he had tried to come on board, I would have splut his skull," said Murdoch, coolly. "And they sah I wass ready for them; and then there wass a good dale of sweering, and they went aweh."

We now inquired of him whether he felt

* *Threepit* = maintained or asserted.

any nervous qualms about being left alone on board in this pirate-infested city; but Murdoch's mind was quite easy on that point. Indeed, we discovered that Columbus and the Horse-Marine were coming back at one o'clock to fetch him away for an exploration of the wonders of Bristol city, the friendly owner of a neighbouring smack having offered to keep an eye on the Nameless Barge during the afternoon. So we left full instructions about our departure on the morrow, and made our way ashore again.

Now, as those other people would not be back from the Cathedral till near lunch-time, we set forth on a long ramble to fill in the interval—wandering along the old-fashioned streets, and admiring here and there an ancient gable or latticed window, visiting a church or two (we incontinently broke the tenth commandment in regarding the beautiful old oak pews in St. Mary Redcliffe), and generally finding ourselves being brought up sharply by the twisting and impassable harbour. It was during this aimless perambulation that Jack Duncombe made a confession of far greater importance than his change of views about the function of criticism. What led up to it one does not precisely

remember; perhaps it was merely the opportunity; for there were not many chances of talking in confidence on board the Nameless Barge. At all events, it was when we were walking down Redcliffe Hill that he began to say—

“Well, I shall be glad when we get away from these towns into the quiet, pastoral districts again. Living on board is ever so much better fun than putting up at an hotel. It used to be so delightful to have merely to choose out a meadow and a few willow-stumps, and pass the night where you pleased. I am looking forward to the Kennet and Avon; and I don’t mind telling you that I hope to enjoy this last part of the trip a great deal more than any that came before——”

“Naturally. The consciousness of having attained to the dignity of being a reviewer——”

“Oh, no; not that,” he says simply. “But, of course, that will be a pleasant occupation. And won’t I astonish my editor-friend by my thoroughness! There’s no reason why short notices shouldn’t be well done—not the least; and I have no cause for scamping; I have plenty of time. Oh, I’ll show him something. But it isn’t that at all that promises to make

the last part of this trip rather gay for me. No. The truth is, when I had to leave you at Warwick, I was in a little bit of a scrape——”

“We guessed as much.”

“And it threatened to become a rather serious scrape. I suppose I may tell you the story, now that it's all over. You see, there is a young lady——”

“Of course.”

“Yes, there generally is; but this one is a ward in Chancery,” he remarks calmly.

“What?”

“A ward in Chancery—that is where the trouble comes in. Her mother is a waspish old vinegar-cruet—tremendously proud of her ancestry—the family have been settled in Wilts since the time of Edward III.—at least so they say—and of course she hates me like poison. I can fancy the old cat crying ‘Imagine Maud marrying the son of a man who hasn't even a coat of arms on his carriage!’ And I suppose it was she who set the guardians against me; though what I had done I don't know—except that the paragraph devoted to us in the ‘County Families of the United Kingdom’ is uncommonly short. Well, you know, that talk

about Edward III. is ridiculous nowadays," continues this garrulous and discursive young man. "I call it ridiculous. If you can paint a picture, or compose a piece of music, or write a successful book, that is something to show for yourself. That is what you can do. But merely because some old robber and thief got hold of a lump of land in the fourteenth century, and because your family have stuck to it like limpets ever since—to be proud of *that!*——"

"But about the guardians?" one says to him.

"Oh, they declared that the young lady should remain perfectly free and unbiassed until she came of age: when a girl reaches twenty-one, she suddenly becomes wise—I suppose that's the theory. Well, neither of us seemed to see the fun of that arrangement; and then the guardians proceeded to extremities; yes, they did their little best—or shabbiest, as one might say; they applied to the Vice-Chancellor, and he issued an order directing that all communication should cease between her and me. It seemed hard—and it was hard, for a while. Then one naturally began to think of how to mitigate these cruel circumstances."

“That means, I suppose, that you communicated with her all the same?”

“They pretended to think so,” observes the young man, very slowly. “You see, it is very difficult to define what communications are—very difficult; and you can’t expect lawyers to have large and liberal views. In fact, the Court of Chancery have no sense of humour whatever. If they think you’re playing tricks, they only grow morose. Well, I tell you, when I left you at Warwick, I was in a devil of a fix and no mistake; I had visions of a scene in court, the Vice-Chancellor whisking thunder and lightning all about my head, and finally sending me off to Holloway prison to purge my contempt. And the trouble I had to explain and apologise and give assurances by the yard—I assure you it required a great deal of tact to appear very penitential and yet maintain that there was nothing for you to be penitential about.”

“So you are engaged to be married, are you?” one says to him (involuntarily recalling certain of Queen Tita’s wistful dreams and fancies).

“We’ve been engaged these two years,” he makes answer, “but it has been kept very quiet, owing to that absurd opposition. How-

ever, that will soon be over. Miss Wrexham—I may as well tell you her name—will be of age in about six months. And then,” he adds, in a hesitating kind of way, “I should like your wife to see her. And—and—we shall be going by Devizes, you know.”

“Yes?”

“Well—the fact is—Miss Wrexham has plenty of pluck, you understand; and if your wife were so awfully good-natured as to send her a little bit of a note, she’d drive over to some appointed place—she and her sister drive all about the country in a little pony-chaise of their own; and then Murdoch could hold the pony; and the two girls pop into the saloon; and you’d give them a snack of lunch. I think it would be very jolly—they’re rattling nice girls—plenty of fun in them——”

“And this is what you call obeying the Vice-Chancellor’s order, is it?” one demands of him.

“Oh! I should have nothing to do with it. If your wife asks two young ladies to come and look at a house-boat, how can I help it? I’ll sit dumb all the time if you like.”

“What kind of treatment do they give you in Holloway?”

“Not at all bad, if you’re a first-class mis-demeanant.”

“Do they crop your hair?”

“Certainly not!” (He seemed to have been making inquiries.)

“Anything to drink?”

“A pint of claret with your dinner, or something of that sort.”

“Books?”

“Oh! yes.”

“Then you could fill in the time with reviews and short notices. All right; we’ll consider that project when we get along into Wiltshire.”

Just as we arrived at the entrance of the hotel, we could see the other members of our party coming across the College Green—through the dappled sun and shade beneath the trees. Notwithstanding her partly-veiled face, it was clear that Miss Peggy was laughing merrily; and Colonel Cameron, who was apparently responsible for this breach of Sabbath decorum, had his eyes fixed on the ground; Queen Tita was looking elsewhere.

“By Jove, what a handsome girl that is!” said Jack Duncombe, involuntarily, as he, too, caught sight of the tall young lady.

“Has that never struck you before?”

“Oh! yes, of course—but somehow—in the open sunlight—when you see her at a distance—her figure tells so well——”

“Now that one thinks of it, my young friend, for a person engaged to be married, you seemed to pay a good deal of attention to Miss Rosslyn at one time, and that not so long ago. One might have been excused for thinking that you had serious views——”

“About Miss Rosslyn,” said he, with evident surprise. “No, surely not! I have cheek for most things; but not for that!”

Well; this was a modest speech, at any rate.

“Of course, being so much with her on the boat,” he said, “there were plenty of chances of becoming very friendly; and, I daresay, being shut off from the rest of the world like that, a kind of mutual confidence sprang up: besides, when a girl is exceedingly pretty, and very good-natured, and full of high spirits and enjoyment, you want to make yourself as agreeable as you can——”

“Oh! you do; do you?”

“Why, naturally!”

“But without prejudice to the young lady under the guardianship of the Vice-Chancellor?”

“I am quite sure of this, that Miss Rosslyn has perfectly understood our relations all the way through,” he answered. “I am quite certain of that. Why, if I had been quite free from any engagement, I could not have presumed—I would not have presumed—to regard her with any ambitious hopes of that kind.”

“Really!” In truth, the young man’s humility was quite touching.

“Besides,” he said, in a lower voice (for they were now crossing the street), “it is as clear as noonday who absorbs all her interest now. A precious lucky fellow he is—that is my opinion.”

Of course there was no further word to be said; for the new comers were here; and together we went up the steps of the hotel and made for the coffee-room—the women-folk not staying to remove their bonnets. They had a great deal to say about Norman gateways, and beautiful windows, and impressive music; and it was not for some time that one had an opportunity of pointing out to them the distinguished honour that was now being done them.

“You wouldn’t be chattering like that,” one remarked to them at length; “you

would be silent with a reverential awe—if you only knew who was seated at this table.”

“Who?”—and there was a startled glance round for Banquo’s ghost.

“A Reviewer! There—look at him—he seems harmless enough—but he has become an adjudicator of life and death—the Bloody Assizes begin to-morrow——”

“Is it true, Mr. Duncombe?” Queen Tita cried forthwith. “Have you turned critic?”

“Only in a small way,” he said lightly. “There are some books coming down to-morrow, I believe.”

“Oh, we’ll all help you!” Miss Peggy exclaimed, with generous ardour. “We’ll read them from end to end—every line—and give you the most disinterested opinions——”

“That is precisely what I want,” said he, instantly rising to the occasion. “I want to astonish my editor-friend. He has asked only for paragraphs; but I’ll show him what paragraphs can be—an epigram in every line, or I’m a Dutchman. Isn’t it lucky I happened to bring my memorandum-book? You remember, Miss Rosslyn, when I ventured to show you some of my jottings—well, they didn’t seem to meet with general approval—perhaps, being detached in that way——”

“Yes,” said she shyly, “they *did* sound rather detached, didn’t they?”

“But when I can insert them cunningly into a critical notice—when I can lead up to them—it will be quite different. Well, I’ll take you all into my confidence. After dinner to-night, I will submit some more of those memoranda for your judgment—and you must be quite frank: you needn’t fear *my* pride being wounded. Then you might give me suggestions as to how to use them.”

“Hadn’t we better wait for the books?” Queen Tita suggested, as a member of this Joint-Stock Critical Company.

“Oh, no,” rejoined the Short-noticer, “you can sample the raw materials, and then I’ll see how they can be made up for use afterwards. Of course, if they don’t strike you as being worth anything, then I’ll drop them at once.”

After luncheon we got a carriage and drove away out to the famous downs of which Bristol is very naturally proud. It was a beautiful afternoon—a light westerly wind tempering the hot glare of the sun; and there was everywhere a summerlike profusion of foliage and blossom—of red and white hawthorn, of purple lilac and golden laburnum—

in the pretty gardens that front the long-ascending White Ladies-road. Arrived at the downs, we of course proceeded on foot, across the undulating pasture-land bestarred with squat hawthorn-bushes, that were now all powdered over with pink-white or cream-white bloom. The view from these heights was magnificent: beyond the luxuriant woods in the neighbourhood of the Avon, which were all golden-green in the warm afternoon light, the wide landscape retreated fold upon fold and ridge upon ridge to the high horizon line, becoming bluer and bluer till lost in the pale southern sky. It was only here or there that some far hill or hamlet, some church-spire, or wood-crowned knoll, caught that golden glow, and shone faint and dim; mere distance subdued all local colour; and the successive landscape waves that rolled out to the horizon were but so many different shades of atmospheric azure, lightening or deepening according to the nature of the country. Of topographical knowledge we had none; we only knew that this was a bit of England; and a very fair and pleasant sight it seemed to be.

And then, again, from these lofty heights, we made our way down the steep slopes that

overhang the river, by pathways flecked with sunlight and shade, and through umbrageous woods that offered a welcome shelter on this hot afternoon. Truly Bristol is a fortunate city to have such picturesque and pleasant open spaces in her immediate neighbourhood ; and she has done wisely in not employing too much of the art of the landscape-gardener. There is sufficient of the wilderness about these hanging woods—though there are also smooth winding ways for those who object to scrambling and climbing. And on this quiet Sunday evening both Queen Tita and her young American friend distinctly refused to quit the common, familiar paths. It was in vain that Mr. Jack Duncombe endeavoured to lure them into the pursuit of short-cuts. They called him Chingachgook, and told him to go away. Colonel Cameron said he envied the Bristol boys if they were allowed to come birds'-nesting in these wilds in the early spring : the number of blackbirds that flew shrieking this way and that through the bushes was extraordinary.

Then we climbed up again to the summit of Clifton Down (Durdham Down had been the beginning of our wanderings) and found another spacious landscape all around us—

the deep chasm of the river right beneath; high in the air, but still far below us, the Suspension Bridge; over to the west the beautiful woods of Leigh; and beyond these the stretch of fertile country that lies between the Avon and the Severn. It seemed sad to think that a city like Bristol, with its famous annals and noble traditions, to say nothing of its romantic and picturesque surroundings, should in this nineteenth century be the resort and shelter of pirates. But we comforted ourselves with the assurance that by this time one or other of them must have had his head broken; perhaps two of them were murdered; more probably the whole three of them were in the police-cells; and meanwhile, as our womenfolk had done a good deal of walking on this warm afternoon, we proposed that they should drive back to the hotel, there being plenty of open flies at the base of the hill.

On our way into the town the time was profitably spent in giving sage advice to our young Reviewer about the new career on which he was entering; and as one after another took up the task, it was really astonishing what a number of things he was expected to do and avoid. The anxiety of

these good people about his success was quite touching. They laid down rules of guidance for him; they supplied him with quotations of anything but a recondite character; they even constructed expressions for him which would be effective as coming from the critical chair. Mr. Jack Duncombe took all this "badgering" (as he was pleased to call it) good-naturedly enough; nay, he himself made merry over the phrase "the true Shakespearean touch" being applied, as it usually is applied, to this or that writer of hopeless obscurity of manner and matter.

"Why, the great minds of the world," he exclaimed — "Shakespeare, Homer, Milton, Dante—have invariably been as clear as daylight—their meaning clear as daylight—their style as clear as daylight; and when you get some fellow puddling about in the mudholes of metaphysics—like a duck in a horsepond with its head under water—and you talk of him having the true Shakespearean touch——!"

"But above all," one remarked to him, "you must preach conciseness. Drive that into their heads, whatever you do. Formerly, literature was a leisurely sort of thing; and you dawdled along with a writer, arm-in-arm, just as long as you wanted his company. But

that's all over. Modern hurry won't have anything of that kind. Literature must be boiled down and compressed—Liebig's Extract—try our own condensed butter-milk. You don't lead up to a situation of interest; you reveal it by a lightning flash—— ”

“That's rather a pretty derangement,” he observed casually.

“And I will give you an example, so that you may see what condensation is. Here are three lines—three short lines—

Mr. Fraser

Took a razor :

‘Damme,’ says he, ‘but I’ll amaze her!’

Now, do you see that? That is a lightning-flash situation. The whole position is described; not a superfluous word; not a single useless accessory; Mr. Fraser is the central and commanding figure; there are no ‘minor characters’ brought in to distract attention. Now, that is what you, as a Reviewer, must insist on. There must be no rambling. When you go to your butcher for a beef-steak, it's the beef-steak you want; why should you be expected to look at the rosettes of ribbon he has stuck on his loins of pork? Business is business—you keep them to that. Hammer

it into them. Show them the legend of Mr. Fraser—that is the lightning-flash style.”

“You, all of you, seem to find it rather an amusing kind of thing,” he complained meekly, “that I should have been asked to write a few notices.”

“Oh, I assure you, Mr. Duncombe,” Queen Tita said at once, “that we are quite seriously anxious you should succeed. And I’m sure it can be no joke for the poor trembling wretches who are awaiting your verdict.”

“Oh, as for that,” said he, cheerfully, “I will take a lesson from a friend of mine, who was elected at the Reform at a time when there was a good deal of pilling going on. The only way he could think of showing his gratitude was by voting for every candidate who came on for ballot during the first twelve months after his election. If I’m to be called to the chair of Rhadamanthus, I’ll begin with a year’s leniency.”

“That is very right, at all events, Mr. Duncombe,” Miss Peggy put in approvingly; and therewith we drew up at the steps of the hotel.

At dinner we had our prospects for the morrow to discuss: but also we had our battles of the previous day to fight over again;

and it was observable that Colonel Cameron lost no opportunity of magnifying the possibility of danger attending that passage down the Severn. But a soldier is no diplomatist; we knew well enough what was meant by all this talk about heavy seas and head winds and leaky timbers. It was merely to convince the two women that they had shown the most heroic courage. Well, perhaps they had. They didn't shriek when they saw the water swashing about the saloon. When we were at the roughest part of the voyage they merely sate a little silent—that was all. But one who has remarked the ways of women in somewhat similar circumstances may be pardoned for suspecting that they were in such dread of becoming sea-sick as to be quite oblivious of any other danger; and that they feared neither wind nor waves because they had no time to think of them.

“But I can't make out,” says Miss Peggy, “what that sickle of a moon was doing up there in the east at half-past two in the morning. Of course you lazy people didn't see that; but that was the first thing I noticed when I got out. And we lost the moon so long ago——”

“But the moon is always doing ridiculous

things," Jack Duncombe declares; adding, with fine audacity, "It burned blue at the battle of Dunbar."

"Oh, get out!" one says to this flippant person.

"But it did," he maintains; "for Carlyle says so in his 'Letters and Speeches of Cromwell.' You turn up and see."

Now, what was one to answer? We had not the book with us. Besides, he was a Reviewer; and what is the use of disputing with a Reviewer?

"Of course it must occasionally burn blue," observed Miss Peggy, "or what would be the meaning of the phrase 'Once in a blue moon'?" Here was another instance of the way in which American children are brought up. Who asked for her interference in a matter being discussed by her elders?

"At all events," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "there will be no half-past two for us to-morrow morning, if we are going no further than Bath. And certainly we must wait for your parcel of books, Mr. Duncombe, even if we shouldn't start till mid-day. For we are going to do our very best for you—all of us. There will be such a reading, and judging, and sifting as you never heard of. I think each

volume should be the subject of a general debate."

"I wonder what my editor-friend will think of these inspired paragraphs," Mr. Duncombe remarked modestly. "I shouldn't wonder if he felt quite ashamed to reflect that he had put me on to short notices. The most likely thing is that he will at once ask me to come and edit the paper in his place."

But the worst of it was that while we were thus conspiring together to write a series of short reviews such as the world had never seen the like of before, we presently found that we were to get next to no help from the materials stored up in Jack Duncombe's notebook. When dinner had been cleared away, and cigars and claret placed on the table in our quiet little sitting-room, the young man proceeded, with the utmost frankness, to submit for our judgment the various observations, epigrams, metaphors, jibes, and so forth, that he had recently jotted down; but what could we do with them—or rather, what could he do with them? Here and there one or other of them might have been introduced into the dialogue of a play, or into the conversation of a novel; but the horse and the Horse-Marine hauling in front, and five able-

bodied men shoving behind, couldn't have got these quips and japes lugged into a newspaper article. Not that he complained of our objections. No. What he sought, he said, was honest help and counsel; and if these memoranda were impracticable for his present purpose, they might come in useful at some future time.

"Here, now," he went on, regarding the small scribbled pages, "is a woman so convinced of her son's inability to do anything that she says, 'Well, if you want to see the Thames frozen over, you just get our Jim to try and set it on fire.' Couldn't I make some use of that? Couldn't I say it of the author of a bad book?"

"No," said Miss Peggy, promptly, "not for a year, at least. For a year you are to say nothing cruel."

"Very well; how about this?—'An Irishman thinks of what he can do to worry England; an Englishman thinks of what he can do for himself; a Scotchman thinks of what he can do for Bonnie Scotland.'"

"Well, now, that is very good—that is very good, indeed!" Queen Tita exclaimed, with unusual warmth. "That is excellent, Mr. Duncombe!"

But Mr. Duncombe made answer, rather sadly—

“I perceive that the merit of an aphorism doesn’t lie in its truth, but in the way it appeals to one’s prejudices. I know, for myself, that I always consider an article extremely well-written and unanswerable when it expresses my own view of a subject. However, I don’t see my way to use that, until I come across a Scotch editor.”

Sir Ewen Cameron, it will be observed, was not taking any part in these literary discussions. But he listened—especially when Miss Peggy joined in; and he had secured a comfortable lounging-chair; and his cigar seemed to afford him satisfaction. Jack Duncombe continued—

“Here are a lot of similes and metaphors—or, rather, metaphorical phrases—that I fancy could be worked in, to give a little touch of picturesqueness, don’t you know. ‘As crabbed and vexatious as the bones of a red mullet.’ Couldn’t one say that of a writer’s style? Or of his temper? I think so. ‘As hoarse as a black-throated diver——’”

“But wait a bit—is the black-throated diver a particularly hoarse bird?” one ventures to ask.

“I haven’t the least idea,” he says coolly; “but then, neither has anyone else. And it looks knowing. Oh, yes; I’ll find plenty of use for these phrases. I’ll dot them all over my sentences to give them a kind of picturesqueness. But what’s this?—it opens well, at any rate: ‘If, in the deeps of the abysmal forests’—doesn’t that sound fine?”

“Very fine, indeed!” says Mrs. Three-penny-bit.

“‘If, in the deeps of the abysmal forests, some fifty millions of ages ago, there had lived an ancient seer—a hoary and prophetic ape—a quadrumanous Merlin—who could have looked into futurity and foreseen that the development of his kind would lead to the production of Offenbach’s music and the facetiousness of the thorough-bred Cockney, wouldn’t he have gone down on his knees, and wept, and howled, and prayed to the gods for the instant annihilation of the entire race?’ That sounds very splendid; but I’m afraid it would involve me in controversy. Hello—here’s more about evolution: ‘For millions and millions of years Nature’s system provided that the wild beasts of the earth should prey upon each other, thus effecting a fair kind of compromise. But in these later

days a new species of predatory animal has sprung up, on whom there is no check whatever, and the various races of mankind are left helpless before its furious and savage attacks——”

Here he suddenly, but very quietly, closed the book; and methodically put the elastic band round it; and consigned it to his pocket. In Miss Peggy's eyes there was a quick glimmer of laughing intelligence; Mrs. Threepenny-bit and the Colonel, on the other hand, sate wondering.

“Yes, but you didn't finish, Mr. Duncombe,” said the former. “Who or what are these predatory animals?”

“That was written before your conversion, Mr. Duncombe?” Miss Peggy said, looking at him.

“Yes,” he answered gravely. “Now I am called Paul.”

And then, without any further explanation, he proceeded to say that, after all, Queen Tita was right; and that it would be better to wait for the books themselves to suggest opportunities for the dovetailing in of these fragments of personal experience or reflection. But he counted on our collaboration none the less, he said. The Nameless Barge, during the

next day or two, was to become a kind of reviewing-shop ; with a number of industrious apprentices all working away at the same job, or series of jobs. Nothing was said about remuneration ; perhaps the astonishment and delight and abundant gratitude of the British public were to be our sufficient and glorious reward.

But it was not at all about Mr. Duncombe's future career as a critic that Mrs. Threepenny-bit was concerned when, later on that night, a chance occurred of communicating to her the news of his engagement. At first she professed nothing but a lofty acquiescence. She hoped that the objections of the mamma and of the guardians were founded on nothing but prejudice, and would be removed : as far as she was aware, Mr. Duncombe was a very well conducted, agreeable, and rather clever young man. And if, as she presumed, the young lady was well off, and if the marriage took place, they would probably settle down in the country, with perhaps a house in town ; and he would give up dabbling in those vague literary pursuits that promised him nothing but inky fingers and disappointed ambition. He would be better employed in fencing plantations than in writing farces for comic

theatres. So it may be said that she, somewhat coldly, approved.

But presently she asked this question—

“And Mr. Duncombe was actually engaged to be married when he started with us at the beginning of this trip?”

“Undoubtedly. He says so.”

“Well; it is no business of mine. But I cannot imagine why he should have kept his engagement a secret. It seems to me that when an unmarried young man is asked to make up a party of this kind, and conceals the fact of his being engaged—well, it is very like joining under false pretences.”

Which was rather a strange speech for a woman who had declared again and again that she had not a single match-making idea in her head when we planned the voyage of the Nameless Barge.

CHAPTER VI.

“Thus, thus I steer my bark, and sail
On even keel with gentle gale ;

* * * *

And once in seven years I'm seen
At Bath or Tunbridge to careen.”

“THE top of the morning to you !” says Miss Peggy, coming marching into the coffee-room, and twirling her bonnet by the strings. There is a gay audacity in her face, and health and youth and high spirits are in her shining eyes.

“The same to you and many of them,” one answers humbly.

“I do believe,” she continues, in tones of tragic vexation, “that your English bootmakers are the immediate descendants of the people who lived in the Age of Iron. Why, French and German bootmakers use leather ! But your English bootmakers fix your feet with iron clamps.”

“So your racing and chasing on Durdham and Clifton Downs has found you out—is that it? Well, you’ll have to come better provided to the Highlands—boots with broad toes, double-soled, and with plenty of nails in them to get a grip of the heather.”

“I am not so sure about my ever going to the Highlands,” she says, with something of a change of manner; and she walks along to the window and looks out. Then she returns. “Won’t you go for a little stroll until they come down? It is quite pretty out there.”

This is a command rather than an invitation; one fetches hat and stick; Miss Peggy whips on her bonnet and ties the strings; and presently we are lounging about the College-green, which looks very well in the early sunlight. And the sunlight suits Miss Peggy, too, brightening the pale, clear rose of her complexion, and lending a mystery to her shadowed eyes, and making a wonder and glory of her hair, as many a poor hapless mortal, on both sides of the Atlantic, has discovered to his cost.

“Has Mr. Duncombe’s parcel of books come?” she asks presently.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think he will succeed as a writer?” again she asks in her careless way.

“How can one tell? He hasn’t got very far yet.”

“He is very modest about it,” she says; and then, as on one or two former occasions, she goes on to speak of Mr. Duncombe in rather a cool and critical fashion. “His simplicity is almost amusing. He doesn’t aim at much, does he? Rather a small ambition, wouldn’t you call it, to be writing these little things, and making up plots for farces? Why, if I were a man, I’d win the Victoria Cross or die!” she adds, with superfluous energy.

“Good gracious! if everybody wanted the V.C. how would the world’s business go on?”

“I’m talking about myself personally,” she says resolutely.

“To begin with, you would have to be a soldier.”

“I would be a soldier.”

“You would want an opportunity——”

“I would make an opportunity.”

“Yes, that’s just where the trouble comes in. Don’t you know that some very high authorities have looked rather askance at the V.C. as a temptation to the young soldier to fight for his own hand. And yet they say

that at the First Relief of Lucknow every single man of the 78th Highlanders fought for a Victoria Cross—and, what's more, that every single man earned it——”

“And what was done then?” asks Miss Peggy.

“Why, they left the regiment itself to choose their representatives to get the cross. But the fact is, no Highland soldier should get the V.C.——”

“What?” she says indignantly.

“No Highland soldier should get the V.C. For when the critical occasion comes—when a charge has to be made or a trench to be stormed, then the pipes begin to play, and the Highlander becomes a madman—he is no longer himself. It is unfair all the way round. The pipes madden him and frighten his enemy at the same time. When Sir Archibald Alison called on the pipers to strike up at Amoaful, the Ashantees bolted like rabbits, and the Black Watch couldn't get at them. Well, I hope you will hear a pibroch or two in the Highlands this year: what makes you think you won't be able to go?”

“Oh, as for that,” she says, with rather a proud and hurt air, “I am sure I am at liberty to go, for anything my people at home seem

to care about me. They don't appear to be much concerned as to whether I go or stay."

"No letters this morning?"

"Oh, it isn't this morning—or many a morning back. I don't believe I've heard from home since I left London; and I've written regularly to my sister Emily, every Sunday, sometimes oftener."

"Don't you think they assume that you have withdrawn altogether into the wilds, and that it is no use trying to find you? Or isn't it just as likely that there has been some mistake about forwarding your letters; and that you will find them all in a bundle when you get back to town? We shall soon be making a bee-line for London now."

"Those people have come down," she says, discreetly glancing over to the windows of the hotel; "we must go in."

It was now for the first time that a foreshadowing of the breaking-up of our party began to weigh upon the spirits of one or two of these good folk—particularly upon Colonel Cameron, who became remarkably glum and silent when we were counting up the days it would take us to reach the Thames. Not so with young Duncombe, however.

"Oh, it's no use thinking about that yet,"

said he. "We've all the Avon and the Kennet to do; and we'll soon be away from these towns and into the solitudes again. You didn't build the Nameless Barge to go on a round of visits to cities. There are plenty of delightful stretches of country for you to get through before we say good-bye."

"But for letters, Mr. Duncombe," his hostess said (and she was as polite and courteous to him as ever: it was not to him that she was going to say anything about his having come away with us under false pretences), "shouldn't we decide where the expedition is to end? And not only that, but one or two friends promised to come and meet us at the finish——"

"Oh, I see," said this ingenious young man instantly. "'As You Like It' winds up with a dance—at least, they don't always do it on the stage, but that was what the Duke ordered. Well, we've been in the Forest of Arden—at least, you have been—and there ought to be a little dance before we separate. Oh, yes, we must have a little fling for the last—a Highland fling, if Colonel Cameron prefers it. We strike the Thames at Reading; very well; we can slip down the river to Henley, and put up at the Red Lion. Henley will be a capital

place to leave the boat at, for it will be wanted at the regatta, either by yourselves or some of your friends. And of course we should finish up with a dance: you ask the people, and leave all the arrangements to me."

"And the next morning," Queen Tita remarked rather sadly. "Well, I've said many harsh things about that old boat, but I shall be sorry to leave it. It has taken us into some strange places; and we've had many and many a snug evening together; and I dare say, long days hereafter, when we come together again, there will be plenty to talk over——"

"When you bring Miss Rosslyn to the Highlands with you in the autumn," Colonel Cameron put in quickly. "By that time the whole trip will have become a beatified kind of thing in one's memory; and, as you say, there will be plenty to talk over—plenty——"

"I am sure of this, Sir Ewen," is the rejoinder—and this diminutive major-domo of a woman has an air as if she were herself the proprietor of all the land and seas between the Mull of Cantire and the Butt of Lewis—"I am sure of this, that if we get Peggy with us in the West Highlands she won't

want to look back—she'll have enough to do in looking round."

Miss Peggy is silent. Perhaps she does not want to distress these good friends, who are planning schemes for her delight, by telling them that, after all, she may not be able to go.

Now, in all our wanderings hitherto, we had encountered next to nothing of the slumminess that is supposed to be characteristic of canals; but we were about to get a good solid dose of it at Bristol—for a brief space. When we had our things packed, we drove out towards the bit of canal that connects the Floating Harbour with the Avon; and, having put our portmanteaus (and Jack Duncombe's parcel of books) on the top of the bank, we dismissed the cabs, and calmly awaited the coming of our house-boat. A most squalid neighbourhood was this: the streets grimy; the air pungent with vitriolic fumes; the sky pierced with a hundred chimneys. A populous neighbourhood, too, though the people did not appear to be doing anything: they lounged about the bridge, leaning over the parapet; or they stared at our luggage and ourselves with an absent air. But when, after long waiting, we beheld the Nameless Barge approach (it

was being towed by a small steamer, with the owner of which Captain Columbus had established friendly terms) there was a vast commotion among these idlers; and quite a crowd swarmed down the bank to witness our embarkation and departure. The curiosity of these worthy folk was of the most artless kind. Their comments were uttered without any shamefaced reserve. They did not literally come on board; but they craned their necks—at risk of falling into the water—in order to gain a glimpse into the saloon. Miss Peggy seemed to attract a good deal of their attention; and that young lady, standing on the thwart across the stern-sheets, appeared to be demurely unconscious of their scrutiny. Then the horse was attached; the raree-show began to glide away; and presently we had left that idle population behind, and were slowly passing through malodorous suburbs, that seemed to consist almost exclusively of manufactories.

However, when we had got down by a couple of locks into the wider waters of the Avon, the world began to grow a little greener again. There were still chimneys here and there, and spelter works; but also there were steep red cliffs hanging with foliage, and, on the other side, level meadows catching a faint

shimmer of sunlight. Nay, we came upon a long railway-embankment that was exceedingly picturesque; for the line, being far above us, was invisible; and what we saw was a series of Norman arches half smothered in heavy clusters of ivy. We were becoming quite reconciled to the yellow colour of the Avon, because of the beauty of these steep banks and the luxuriant foliage. Here and there, where there happened to be a clearance among the trees, masses of wild flowers showed themselves — particularly of the red campion. There were the huge leaves of the butterbur along the edge of the stream. And from time to time the soft summer air around us was sweet with the scent of the hawthorn blossom.

“Mr. Duncombe,” says Miss Peggy, as we are gliding smoothly along, under high wooded banks, or by the side of level meads, “when are we to see the books you are going to review?”

The young man glances at her somewhat suspiciously.

“I don’t see why you should find so much amusement in the notion that I am going to try a little reviewing,” he makes answer. “But I don’t bear any malice. I propose we open the parcel now. Let’s have Murdoch

called to take the tiller; then we can all go into the saloon—a Council of Five. But mind, it's your co-operation I want; not sarcasm. And I don't see anything funny about it myself: why shouldn't I write reviews as well as other people?"

"What is this that has come unto the son of Kish?" says Queen Tita, darkly; and then she rises and takes Miss Peggy's hand in hers. "Come along, Peggy; let's go and see the books.

'Come down the cabin-stair,
And comb your yellow hair,
Said the Captain unto pretty Peggy, O.'

"What is that?" the younger lady asks, as she follows her hostess into the saloon.

"Oh, I don't know," the other answers lightly. "A bit of an old song. I don't remember any more of it. But that's always the way: it's pretty Peggy who is asked to go down below, and make herself smart, and take her place at the captain's table; while plain Susan, or Moll, or Bridget can remain on deck, and nibble dried herring. Now, Mr. Duncombe, your knife, please! I think, Peggy, as we are women, our curiosity should be gratified first."

Accordingly, when the string had been cut,

and the pile of books laid bare, these two forward creatures took the whole matter of investigation into their own hands; and the very first volume that Queen Tita seized upon caused her to break forth into a most unseemly giggle.

"Mr. Duncombe, what are your views upon this question?" she asked.

"What question?" said he.

She gravely handed him the book; it was entitled: "On the Management of Infancy." But did these two sniggering fiends think to disconcert him? Then they were mistaken.

"Oh," said he, as bold as a lion, "you needn't think I am so ignorant. Views?—I have plenty of views. Haven't I read Mr. Spencer's treatise on Education? Very well. Either this writer approves, or protests against, the process of hardening children. Whichever position he takes up, I can face him, and remonstrate with him, and talk to him like a father. The worst of it is," he continued seriously (and one of us began to suspect that it was not he, but his persecutors, who were being trifled with), "that I don't believe I ever jotted down a single saying about children—I don't believe there is one anywhere in any of my note-books. Isn't that a pity? You

see, that's just where the bother is : you can't make those things to order ; and what memoranda you do put down seem never to be wanted. But I must have a flash, you know—a scintillation—here and there—something pointed and epigrammatic and luminous—even if it's only about infants. Infants ! Who ever thought of making epigrams about infants ? They are not worth the trouble—the horrid little idiots ! But still—still—I must have a flash or two.”

Miss Peggy took up a volume.

“ ‘Modern Hinduism.’ What will you say about that, Mr. Duncombe ? ” she asked.

“Modern Hinduism ? ” he repeated. “Well, you see, one great advantage is that I don't know anything at all about it. I have no prejudices or prepossessions. My mind is virgin soil. If the man instructs me properly, I will thank him ; if he amuses me, I will thank him still more ; but if he is a dull dog, I will arise and smite him in the eye.”

“Oh, no ; you can't do that,” she interposed, “not for a year, at least.”

Then it was Queen Tita's turn.

“ ‘Gout in its Relation to the Liver,’ ” she read out seriously. “Have you studied that subject, Mr. Duncombe ? ”

"Thank goodness, no!" our Reviewer exclaimed—heedless of the responsibilities of his craft; and then he added, "Now, how is anyone to bring in lightning-flashes—coruscations—things of that kind—when you're writing about the liver?"

"Be wise, instead," said Colonel Cameron. "An old doctor-friend of mine used to say that the liver was the conscience of the body, that told you when you had done anything wrong. Now, there is an axiom for you—couldn't you work that in?"

"I might; but if your doctor-friend were to come along and claim the copyright?"

"Poor fellow, he's not likely to do that," Sir Ewen answered; "his bones are at the bottom of the Red Sea."

"I'll jot it down anyway," said our Short-noticer, thankfully. "Maybe it will come in. But I never undertook to become epigrammatic about gout. That wasn't in the contract. You'll have to give me an easier one. What's that, there, Miss Rosslyn?"—for Miss Rosslyn was grinning.

"I think you have a famous opportunity here," Miss Peggy said, "although it is only a pamphlet: 'The Modern Stage and its Critics.' Doesn't that give you a chance?"

I see names mentioned. You might wipe off some old scores."

"What?" he said indignantly. "Abuse a position of trust to serve private malice? Never! What do you take me for?"

"Ah," she said, "I perceive: you're one of themselves now."

"Nevertheless," said he thoughtfully—and he stretched out his hand for the pamphlet—"it is just possible one might have a public duty to fulfil. I wonder if Biddles is mentioned—or MacMurtough, of the *Whack*—or poor old Tommy Swills, who can hardly hold up an opera-glass with his gouty fingers——"

"Look at him!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in an awestruck aside. "Look at the baleful fire gathering in his eyes!"

"I don't say," he continued loftily, "that I would have asked to be allowed to review this pamphlet. No. There is nothing more loathsome and contemptible than malice—private malice—striking with coward hand in the dark; and you would naturally avoid even any semblance of that. But supposing you have a public duty to perform, in the interests of the stage; and if these fellows have been making use of *their* opportunities to air

their aversions and prejudices and venal favouritism——”

“Then the Lord has delivered them into your hand,” Sir Ewen said, in a kind of joyful fashion, as if he sniffed the battle from afar.

“I am more interested in that review than in any of the others; I hope we shall all have a chance of seeing it before the party breaks up.”

“And then, again,” the young man continued, “when I promised to exercise leniency for a year, that was with regard to the authors of books, not their subjects. I may curse gout as much as I like, if I am civil to the man who writes about gout. In the same way, I may say what I like about these stage-critics—oh, don’t I know the brutes——!”

“Mr. Duncombe—Mr. Duncombe!” Queen Tita exclaimed. “I am really ashamed of you! That is not the mood in which you should set about examining a literary production, whatever its subject may be. Goodness gracious, you should be as calm, and dispassionate, and phlegmatic as an owl. I really don’t think you should notice that pamphlet at all.”

“But the interests of the public!” he exclaimed. “The interests of the public

demand it! Besides, on *that* subject I've got about thirty aphorisms all ready—I'll stick them in as thick as plums in a pudding. Oh, I assure you I never expected to get such a chance."

He looked inquiringly at the pile of books over which the two women were hovering, as if it were a bran-pie. Queen Tita took up the next volume.

"'Fluctuations in General Prices: their Cause and Cure,'" she read aloud, without any comment.

For a second the young man looked rather staggered.

"Yes, that *is* a facer," he remarked slowly. "Still, the humbly receptive mind may find something to say even about that."

"'Shakespeare and Ben Jonson: A Comparative Study,'" she went on.

"Ah, well, there now," he cried, brightening up at once, "there, now, is something I should like to write about. I don't care which side the man takes; I'll cut out my own line; I'll back the magic romanticism of Shakespeare against the realism of Ben Jonson at anything you like—a hundred to one—a hundred to nothing! Romanticism against realism—that's my tip; I know which has the strongest staying

power. I'll back Dumas in the long run to knock Balzac into a cocked hat. Why—but, hello, what's that—— ? ”

For indeed this elegant excursus in the domain of criticism—the Newer Criticism—was summarily cut short by the stoppage of the boat ; and when one went out to see what the matter was, Captain Columbus, on the bank, was good enough to inform us that we were now near to Keynsham, which would be an opportune place for baiting the horse. We acquiesced in this arrangement ; Columbus, the horse, and the Horse-Marine departed ; and Murdoch, no longer wanted at the tiller, was summoned into the saloon to provide us with some snack of luncheon—that bundle of books being swept into a corner for the present.

Well, it was during this foregathering that Miss Peggy—listening to our random talk—was at length driven to confess that she thought she would be unable to go to the Highlands with us that autumn. Mrs. Threepenny-bit seemed somewhat startled ; and looked at the girl curiously ; it was clear that she suspected there might be occult reasons for this decision which it would be better not to inquire too curiously about. Indeed, when Miss Peggy was invited to give us some kind

of excuse for this change of plan, her answer was vague enough.

“I want to know that I have a home,” she said, with downcast eyes. “They have let me drift away too far. If I were once back in America, among my own people, I dare say I should soon be ready to start away again; but at present, I feel just a little lost.”

So she went on with her nebulous explanations; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit listened; and said nothing. It was easy to divine that the small creature was distracted by very divergent hopes and desires. Was Peggy, then—after all the magnifying of the Highlanders and the Highland regiments, and her interest in the clans, and her pity for the misfortunes of Bonnie Prince Charlie—was Peggy to go away back to Brooklyn before her education was completed by a visit to Inverfask and the Western Isles? On the other hand—in view of certain contingencies—was it not entirely advisable that the girl should return to her own people forthwith, and remain in the clear atmosphere of America until certain cobwebs of Old-World romance had got blown out of her head? Driving in Prospect Park, or pacing the sands at Long Branch, she would soon forget that she had ever seen any par-

ticular fascination in the fancy of having a piper marching up and down outside the dining-room window, with the pipes screaming away at "Lord Breadalbane's March" or "Wha'll be King but Charlie?"

But this mild balancing and "swithering" was very different from the energetic protest of Colonel Cameron.

"Why, Miss Rosslyn, I have been looking on it as a definite engagement that you two ladies should pay a visit to Inverfask this autumn. I don't think I can let you off. I have been planning excursions—indeed, the whole thing is arranged; and I cannot allow you to treat me so badly as that. Oh, no, if you think of it, it is hardly fair——"

She glanced at him rather timidly.

"I may be able to come back to England," she said vaguely.

"But you don't seem to have any special reason for returning to America just at present," said he.

"Well, no," she admitted; "not any very special reason, perhaps. It is more a feeling than anything else. I should like to know what is going on at home. And it seems to me that I have been an outcast and a vagrant long enough."

In this indeterminate fashion the matter was allowed to rest for the moment; but it was obvious that it was weighing on Sir Ewen Cameron's mind. He did not take the customary interest in our arrangements for starting again, when Columbus and the Horse-Marine had come back; and subsequently, when we had to get through one or two locks, he did not lend a hand as usual. A smurr of rain had come over; like the rest of us, he had put on a waterproof; and he merely stood in the stern-sheets, idly looking away over the wet landscape, and towards some low-lying hills that were as ghostly shadows behind the pall of green mist. Nay, in one of the locks, when Miss Peggy had espied some clusters of the small purple toad-flax, and also an abundance of hart's-tongue fern, and expressed a wish to have some of these, it was Jack Duncombe who came to her aid. Colonel Cameron looked thoughtful and anxious; and paid but little heed to what was going on.

But by-and-by the afternoon began to clear. The clouds gradually lifted; and there were gleams of lemon yellow among the soft purples and greys. The still waters of the winding Avon mirrored every feature of the bank; and further off the skies were reflected too—a

shimmer of silver here and there, a breadth of liquid lilac darkening almost to black under the trees; while over the glassy surface darted innumerable swifts and martens, busy in the still, warm, moist air. By this time, of course, waterproofs had been thrown aside; and as we came to a convenient landing-place, the boat was stopped as we got ashore—all but Jack Duncombe, who was eager to get at his books.

Now it was Sir Ewen Cameron who assisted Miss Peggy to step along the gangboard; and when she had reached the bank these two naturally went on together—at first walking pretty smartly so as to get ahead of the horse. Queen Tita was in no such hurry.

“What is taking that girl back to America?” she asks presently, looking away along the tow-path towards those two.

“Who can tell? She doesn’t seem to know herself!”

“But perhaps she is right,” this small person continues, rather wistfully. “Yes; even if it is only some vague kind of feeling. And if she was once over there, and were to come back, then we couldn’t be held responsible for anything that might happen. Of course, I hope she will come back. It is very

curious what a hold that girl gets over one, when once you know her well ; how you can't help mixing her up with all your plans and forecasts ; why, I declare, England wouldn't be half England to me if I didn't know that, sooner or later, I could look forward to seeing my Peggy again."

"Your Peggy !"

"Yes, indeed," she continues boldly. "Oh, anyone could see how all you men have been fighting for her good graces—for a word or a smile or a look ; but she has kept to me all the time. Do you think she doesn't know what men are ? I wish I could let you hear some of her confidences ! Perhaps you would like to know ?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, when I think of it, I don't believe you would."

"So that is her gratitude, is it, and her honesty ? Pretending to be friends with everybody on board ; and then, at night, in the secrecy of the ladies' cabin, making base revelations and sarcasms ? Ordinary folk would say that that was the conduct of a sneak."

"She is not a sneak !" this infinitesimal firebrand exclaims, blazing up in a minute. "She is my dear friend ; and I wish I knew

many like her. Yes, I wish there were many women like her, in England, or America, or anywhere else. Oh, I know her faults. I know Peggy." And here Mrs. Threepenny-bit suddenly alters her manner, and laughs a little, to herself. "Yes—she's a wretch; and I can't deny it. But I love her; and that's all I have got to say about her."

And it was a good deal to say; for this Jenny-wren of a disciplinarian is accustomed to judge of her young women friends by a rather severe standard of conduct and aim. But then, again, as has been pointed out in these pages once or twice, Miss Peggy was rather pleasant-looking—in a kind of way, that is; and a bright complexion, a smiling mouth, and clear-shining eyes make for favour and leniency; besides which, she was a kind of solitary young creature, away from her native country and her friends, and, therefore, to be protected and regarded with gentleness. She had been called a White Pestilence, it is true; but that was in bygone days. And now there was a chance of our losing her altogether, it was not only Mrs. Threepenny-bit who loathed the prospect: by what right were the United States of America about to take away from us our pretty Peggy?

Poor Peggy ! She seemed most unusually grave when we had all to get on board again—for we were now drawing near to Bath. Not only that, but she appeared to be at once absent-minded and apprehensive : subsiding into a deep reverie from time to time, and yet anxiously responding to any remark addressed to her, so that her thoughtfulness might not be noticed. She had no further quips and questions about Jack Duncombe's bundle of books. She took some tea in silence. And then these two women-folk had to be left by themselves ; for we were now getting to the end of the day's voyage ; and Captain Columbus, outside, was awaiting orders.

The approach to the beautiful Queen of the West, by the valley of the Avon, is disappointing in the extreme ; indeed, the slums here are about as bad as those of the Totterdown suburb of Bristol. Our appearance in these squalid outskirts was the signal for a mighty flutter of excitement ; from all quarters there came rushing a multitude of ragged mudlarks—between five and fifteen their ages seemed for the most part to range—not one of whom, as far as we could see, was possessed of cap or bonnet ; and these formed our ever-

increasing escort as we slowly passed along the muddy waters. Nor was the general perturbation confined to those on foot; everywhere windows were thrown open, and dishevelled heads thrust out; there were calls from this house to that; and echoing answers from below. When at last we stopped at one of the quays—amid the cranes, and piles of wood, and coal, and what not—the crowd grew greater than ever; and it was all that Murdoch, armed with a boathook, could do to keep those betattered arabs from swarming over the roof of the house.

It was abundantly manifest that here was no abiding place for us; again—and for the last time on this trip—we should have to sleep ashore; and so, when a few things had been put into the various hand-bags, we set off, a small procession, through the streets of Bath, putting up at a hotel where, notwithstanding our suspicious want of luggage, we were made fairly welcome and furnished with rooms.

“This will be the last of the towns, anyway,” Jack Duncombe said—as if by way of general apology. “To-morrow we shall be off into the wilds again; and nothing more will be heard of us until we appear in the Thames.”

And then again, while we were at dinner, he said—

“Don’t you think that now we are in Bath, we should devote the evening to fashion and frivolity? Suppose we call for chairs, and go off to the play; or perhaps there is a ball at the Assembly Rooms—with all the great folk there. I’ll tell you what I should like to see as we were going in—we might just come upon them—the young lady, very pretty, of course, with high-waisted muslin dress, fan, and a feather or two in her hair—the young gentleman in long-tailed coat, ruffles, and rosettes; and she is all palpitation and fright, and he is all courage and devotion, as he wraps her cloak round her and puts the hood over her head. Then, you must imagine the chariot, and horses, and postillion just round the corner; the young lady trips along, and pops in, her spark following; and then hey! for Gretna-green. That’s what I would call an incident, now—Gretna-green in a ball-dress—there’s some romance in that. But when we came through those dull and dead and sombre streets this evening who could have believed that anything of the kind ever happened in Bath?”

We did not go to either ball or play; but

perhaps it was to be in sympathy with the spirit and traditions of the place that, a little later on, when the table had been cleared, cards were produced, and a mild game of vingt-et-un begun. It was with some difficulty that Miss Peggy—who was still unaccountably reserved in manner and *distrainte*—was induced to join; but Jack Duncombe would take no denial: accordingly, when she drew in her chair, she seized the first opportunity that presented itself of smuggling half-a-dozen of the cards into her lap. It was her usual custom—when she happened to be at the end of the table, and could make sure of friendly connivance. With this repertory to draw from, she seldom had much difficulty in making up the coveted twenty-one; so that her success at the game had become proverbial.

Now, some people would say that this was cheating; but that is taking a very shallow and superficial view of a serious subject. For what nobler aim can inspire the mind than to redress the inequalities of Fortune, and mitigate her harsh decrees? At this game of vingt-et-un, when you are dealt a ten and a two, everyone knows that, if you call for a third card, the spiteful fates will almost cer-

tainly crush you with another ten. But what if you can—without asking for any third card—simply drop the two into your lap, and replace it with an ace? Or if you happen to have fourteen in your hand, and are dealt a nine as an additional card, why should you not drop that nine if you have a seven in your lap? You are defeating the maleficent spirits who preside over games of chance. You are probably teaching a wholesome lesson to the other players: there will be the less likelihood of their becoming confirmed gamblers. It is true that it is only your own evil fortune that you amend; but doesn't the world get on very well on the principle that each man must do the best possible for himself? Everybody can't win; but by this simple expedient you make sure of one winning; and why not yourself as well as another? If the spectacle of a good man struggling with adversity be grateful to the gods, how much more the spectacle of a good man rising triumphant? Magnanimity, not selfishness, springs up and blossoms in the soul of those who hold good cards at *vingt-et-un*. How often has the present writer beheld a young lady—who shall be nameless—sur-reptitiously convey to her nearest neighbour,

a six, or a five, or a three—just as he happened to want it—instead of meanly seeking to secure all the stakes for herself?

But on this particular evening, Miss Peggy would seem to have abstracted these cards chiefly as a matter of custom—or perhaps to save trouble to the dealer ; at all events, she played in a perfunctory manner, and as one who had but little heart in the game. She did not even take the trouble to win. It was Queen Tita who was winning most ; and Mr. Duncombe who was losing most. At last the latter said to the former—

“ I’m afraid I must trouble you to sell me a couple of dozen.”

But Colonel Cameron interposed :

“ Oh, no ; here, I will lend you a dozen ”—and he told off the counters and shoved them over : whereupon the younger man observed—rather neatly, as we thought—“ Hail to the chief who in triumph advances ! ” and he therewith scooped together the bits of bone.

It was at this point Miss Peggy rose, begging to be excused from further play.

“ Here, Mr. Duncombe,” said she, “ if you are losing, I bequeath you all my wealth. And I hope you will all win.”

She went and got a book, and ensconced

herself in an easy-chair—rather turning her back on us, indeed, so that the gaslight should strike on the page. But perhaps it was not to read that she had thus forsaken the card-table? That night, before we separated, the humble chronicler of these events had a small folded note covertly handed to him; and, on subsequently opening it, he found it to contain these words—

“Shall you be down early to-morrow morning? I want to say something very particular to you—in private.—PEGGY.”

Poor Peggy! Was it the thought of going away across the wide Atlantic again that was pressing heavily on her heart?

CHAPTER VII.

“For who would leave, unbribed, Hibernia’s land,
Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
There none are swept by sudden fate away,
But all, whom hunger spares, with age decay :
Here malice, rapine, accident conspire,
And now a rabble rages, now a fire ;
Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
And here the fell attorney prowls for prey ;
Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead.”

THIS day began with glooms and disappointments ; then blossomed forth into a summer-like luxuriance of all beautiful things ; and finally ended in joy and calm content. Perhaps it was our general impatience of towns, and our anxiety to be away in the wildernesses again, that led us to form so poor an opinion of the appearance of Bath ; but anyhow the morning was wet and louring ; the windows seemed dingy ; and the spectacle of a crowd of

people hurrying along muddy pavements, most of them with umbrellas up, to their respective shops and offices was modern and commonplace and depressing. This was not what we had expected of the famous Queen of the West. All her former glories seemed to have vanished away behind that mournful pall of rain.

And then, again, the assignation that had been planned the evening before did not take place. Everybody seemed to come into the little sitting-room about the same moment; and Miss Peggy had no opportunity of saying a word. During breakfast she was quite silent; and thereafter, when there was a general hunt for waterproofs and umbrellas, she set about getting ready in a mechanical way, though it was chiefly for her sake we were about to explore the town. At the door of the hotel she merely said, in an undertone—

“Some other time I will speak to you——” and then we went out.

Now of all the interesting things in Bath, surely the most interesting is the Abbey Church, with its storied walls. These innumerable marble tablets, all ranged and crowded together, are neither ancient nor modern; many of the names are familiar; many of the families well known in the present day; and

yet they speak of a time and a phase of society become strangely distant. These good people, drawn from their quiet country seats to this brilliant centre of the world, would seem to have been rather proud of burial in Bath Abbey Church and of a tablet on its walls. It was "striking for honest fame" in those days; it was securing a kind of immortality; for would not rank and fashion reign in Bath for ever? And so you can see how the biographies of these simple human beings—the details of their lineage and family connections, of their possessions, and of their doings (if any)—have been placed here on record to claim the attention of the gay, gossiping crowd. The gay, gossiping crowd! Besides ourselves—a small party of damp and melancholy strangers—there did not appear to be a soul in the place. The wits and beaux and belles and card-playing dowagers have all vanished; the famous Pump Room is almost deserted; Bath itself has fallen upon evil days; and the figures who hurry along its pavements—in the pitiless rain—are no longer in resplendent attire, but in dingy garments of modern broadcloth, which get splashed with mud as the omnibuses clatter by. The immortality of these good folk buried in the Abbey

(who might just as well have composed themselves to rest under the grass and daisies of their own village churchyard) did not last very long. But an occasional tourist looks in, no doubt—or perhaps a young warehouseman seeking shelter from a passing shower; and either may, if he chooses, stand before these ingenuous memorials and try to imagine for himself what kind of people swarmed to Bath when Bath was fashion's queen.

Hunting for curiosities among these mural tablets proved to be an engrossing occupation with our party; so that Miss Peggy was enabled to lag a little behind without being observed, while a slight finger-touch on the arm secured her the listener she wanted. The young lady seemed at once shy and anxious: there was more colour in her face than usual; and when she spoke it was in a hurried and low undertone.

“I want your advice,” said she; “perhaps you may think I should speak to your wife—but—but I would rather have a man's advice. Your wife has very exalted ideas—she might be a little too uncompromising; and I would rather you would tell me what ordinary people would say and think. Besides, I spoke to you about it before. Do you remember? It was

one morning on the Thames—by Magna Charta island——”

“I remember perfectly.”

“Well,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation, “that affair remains just where it was. I—I was really talking of myself——”

“I guessed as much.”

“You did?” she said with a quick glance.

“Yes; but of course I was not at liberty to say anything.”

There was another moment of hesitation; then she began to speak, rather slowly, and with downcast eyes.

“Tell me what you think I should be justified in doing. . . . Mind, it was only a half-and-half kind of engagement—you must have guessed that, too—an understanding, indeed. . . . Both families were anxious for it . . . and—and I liked him a little—oh, yes, he is very amusing, and makes the time pass—and I dare say he liked me well enough when everything was going prosperously. Then you know how my father’s affairs went wrong,” she continued, with an occasional glance towards those other people to make sure they were not observing her; “and there was a change after that; and you remember I asked you whether most people wouldn’t consider that a young

man was quite right, and doing a sensible thing, in hesitating. Sensible?—yes, he is very sensible, and prides himself on it. Oh, I know what his ambitions are. He wants to get among the millionaires; he wants to run the biggest yacht afloat, and to have paragraphs about himself in the papers. That is why he has never come to Europe; he never will come to Europe until he has money enough to get himself talked about. And then, when my father's affairs went wrong, I suppose it was but natural he should begin to think twice; and, although he has never said he wanted the engagement broken off—no, for he is afraid of quarrelling with his own people—he has left me pretty free to imagine that I can go if I choose. Oh, I am not vexed," she continued (but now her head was drawn up a little); "I am not vexed. Of course, a girl does not like to be thrown over——"

"You thrown over!"

"It is not quite so bad as that; for he writes to me from time to time—in a kind of a way—and I am left to understand that he considers the engagement binding if I wish it. If I wish it! I am to be the one to hold to it!—to demand execution! Well; a girl doesn't quite like that," she added, with just the least

passing tremor in her voice ; but doubtless it was pride rather than any sense of injury that was driving her to speak.

“ So I want you to tell me what I should be justified in doing,” she resumed presently. “ I know what your wife would say. Yes ; I know. She would say that when a girl has once promised—or even been entangled into an understanding—she is bound in honour to keep to it. Yes—but—but a girl may make herself too cheap, mayn’t she ?—and one ought to have some kind of self-respect—— ”

“ Oh, Miss Rosslyn, come along here for a minute ! ” a third person broke in : it was Jack Duncombe. “ I have discovered the tablet put up to commemorate the illustrious virtues of Beau Nash. It’s beautiful. Come along, and I will translate it for you.”

So Miss Rosslyn was haled away, somewhat to the relief of the person whom she had been consulting. For it was not quite so easy as it looked to say offhand what Miss Peggy should do in these circumstances. Of course, the natural man was moved to answer at once, “ Oh, tell that young cub in New York to go to the mischief, and ten miles further ! ” But there were considerations. The wishes of two families were not lightly to be thrown aside.

The cub might not be so much of a cub, after all; on the contrary, he might be a perfectly honest, sober, industrious member of society, with feelings just like another, but perhaps with no great faculty of expressing them in correspondence. But the chief reason for doubt was this: When a young woman asks for advice, she knows quite well what advice she hopes for; and, as a rule, she is inordinately skilful in angling for it. Little difficulty has she in getting up a presentable tale. And how could one accept Miss Peggy's facts as being all the facts? For one thing, it seemed hardly believable or possible that our peerless Peggy should be in any risk of being "thrown over." We, who had known her for some time, and seen her in various circles in London, had got into a way of asking ourselves: "Well, now, to whom is Peggy going to fling the handkerchief, after all?" And to think that in New York, or Brooklyn, or some such place across the water, there was a young man who, instead of thanking Heaven a hundred times a day for his great good fortune, was rather inclined to hang off, and hesitate, and postpone, with visions of dollars, and yachts, and newspaper paragraphs more nearly occupying his mind—this was hardly conceivable.

When lovers quarrel, they are capable of saying anything of each other. Perhaps Miss Peggy was temporarily indignant because of the coldness of those letters, or the infrequency of them? One seemed to want to know more; or to take refuge in silence. For here was apparently a settlement of her life—approved by both the families immediately concerned—which was not to be regardlessly shattered, without very definite cause shown.

As it happened, no further opportunity was afforded Miss Peggy of reopening this delicate subject during our brief exploration of the antiquities and curiosities of Bath; and in due course of time we had finished our peregrination, and were driving, in a couple of cabs, to that point of the Kennet and Avon Canal where, as we understood, the Nameless Barge was now awaiting us. And very different, indeed, was the manner of our leaving from the manner of our arrival. Just as we reached the banks of the canal, the heavy rain ceased, and a burst of warm sunlight filled all the air; while we had hardly set forth before we found ourselves in an enchanted garden of overhanging foliage. Here was no squalor of slums; but a wilderness of rain-washed leaves flashing million upon million of white

diamonds ; the yellow tassels of the laburnum, the rose-red clusters of the hawthorn, the milky minarets of the chestnut all aglow in the light. And then, by-and-by, when we had stolen through these closed and guarded paradises, behold ! a great valley lay far beneath us ; and, beyond, a range of wooded heights with the suburbs of Bath stretching out, terrace on terrace, into the open country. This Kennet and Avon Canal, winding snake-like along the side of the hill, gave us wider and wider views as we glided onwards : the last traces of the city began to disappear ; far below us the Avon gleamed a thread of silver between its alders and its willows ; the heights beyond rose into a series of receding woods along the high horizon line. And then the blessed warmth of the sunlight ! Our water-proofs were flung along the roof of the house, to bask and dry there. A sense of freedom and lightness and movement prevailed. We felt as if we had come out of some cribbed and cabined place—a dark and depressing and liquid place—into a wider world of comfort and sweetness and pleasant sights and sounds. The gracious air about us was laden with subtle scents. The birds were singing. We were glad to have done with the last of the towns.

And ever the beautiful valley increased in loveliness and loneliness as we followed the slow windings of our galleried water-way, high up on this hill-side. We had all this world of sunlight and green leaves and sweet-blowing winds entirely to ourselves. We met with no one. Miss Peggy was up at the bow, her throat bare to the warm breeze, her hair, unshielded by any bonnet, showing threads of burnished gold in the sunlight. Jack Duncombe was standing beside her, with an Ordnance map spread out on the roof of the house. Perhaps she was listening to him; but now and again she looked along to the steersman, in a puzzled and curious way. She seemed to say: "Well, have you considered yet? What would the general voice say I was justified in doing? And when will there be a chance for you to let me know?" Colonel Cameron was talking to Queen Tita about what he should do if he settled down in the West Highlands; amongst other things, he seemed to have some notion of getting one or two young seals and training them to hunt salmon for him. The Horse-Marine was sitting sideways on his horse, and contentedly smoking. Captain Columbus had thrown aside his coat, because of the hot sun, and

was marching along a great way ahead. Murdoch was within, no doubt putting our toy-house to rights.

Then we came to the Dundas Aqueduct, which spans the wide vale; and here the spacious view was more extensive than ever—the landscape disappearing into tender distances of rose-grey and lightest green until, at the far horizon line, and melting into the silvery sky, there were touches of pale, translucent blue. But this aqueduct carried us across the valley—to the slopes of Knowl Hill, in fact; and very soon we had left the wide, open country behind us, and were plunged into umbrageous woods. It was much hotter here; there was hardly a breath of air to stir the shelving branches that felt their way out into the sunlight; and it was but rarely that the intervening foliage afforded any shelter. Nevertheless, these good people would insist on going for a stroll along the tow-path—all except Miss Peggy, who, at the last moment, abruptly changed her mind, and decided to remain with the steersman, to cheer him with her company.

“This might be a river in a Brazilian forest,” said she, “for the beauty of it, and the solitude.”

It was not of any river in Brazil she was thinking; she was but waiting until those people on the bank were out of earshot.

Then she said presently—

“Have you thought that over?”

“Yes.”

Her next question was not put into words; it was a nervous flash of inquiry that appeared in her eyes. Then she looked down again, as if awaiting judgment. She had a bit of red hawthorn in her hand; and her fingers were pulling into small shreds one or two of the dark-green leaves.

“Well, you see, Miss Peggy, if your description of the situation is literally correct—literally and absolutely correct—then you would be amply justified in telling that young gentleman in New York to go and be hanged. That is what any man would say—offhand, and at once. But there may be little qualifying things. It isn’t any temporary estrangement, is it, that may be made up? Your pride may have been wounded; are you sure you don’t exaggerate his indifference? You have heard of lovers’ quarrels——”

Miss Peggy tossed her head slightly—the movement was scarcely perceptible.

“—— and people who intervene in these

with any kind of advice generally get a bang on the head for their pains—subsequently, that is, when the lovers have made it up.”

“Lovers!” said she.

“Besides, where is the harm of allowing this engagement, or understanding, or whatever it is, to drift on as it is doing? There may be some explanation. Letters may have been delayed. You may get them when you go back to London.”

“And if there were a hundred letters, do you think I don’t know what would be in them?” she demanded, rather proudly. “And as for drifting and drifting, I have grown a little tired of that. It is no great compliment to a girl to put her in such a position. I dare say, now, if I were over in America—if I were to go over to America for even a fortnight, I could get the whole matter settled——”

“You really and honestly mean that you want to have it broken off?”

“Broken off!” she exclaimed, with just a touch of indignation in her voice. “It is he who wants to have it broken off—and hasn’t the courage to say so. He won’t own it to me; he won’t own it to his family; but do you think I don’t understand? I am not blind. And however stupid a woman may be at other

times, in an affair of this kind she can see clearly enough."

"That is true. But on the other hand, if you think that this half-and-half engagement should come to an end, why not let it gradually die a natural death? It seems pretty moribund at present, doesn't it? Cease writing to him——"

"He hasn't written to me for nearly two months!"

"Very well. Stop altogether. If that doesn't force him to ask for an explanation—if he asks for no explanation—then the matter is at an end. You go your way; and he his."

"I—I suppose that is good advice; and I thank you," she said, in rather a low voice.

But what followed was most amazing. She stood silent for a second or so; then she turned away a little; and one could see that she had taken out her handkerchief quickly, and was furtively wiping away the tears from her eyes. This was a strange and bewildering spectacle. It was all so unlike our gay and audacious Peggy. And one naturally and instantly jumped to the conclusion that there was a good deal more to reveal.

"I say, Miss Peggy, I am afraid you haven't

told me that story straight. You care for him all the same; is that it?"

"No—o—no!" she said, still with averted face.

"Then there is someone else?"

She turned with a quick look—half-frightened, as it were; then her eyes were downcast. She said nothing; but there was a tell-tale flush in her cheek as rosy-red as was the bit of hawthorn she held in her hand.

"Oh, there is someone else then? But why didn't you say so before? For that makes a very great difference—that makes all the difference in the world! There's someone else? Then you've found yourself fettered; and vexed by the uncertainty; and perhaps to tell you that you should merely let that nebulous engagement disappear of itself wasn't very comforting——?"

Miss Peggy had dried her eyes.

"I am away from my own people," she said in the same low voice, "and perhaps I have been a little anxious and fretting—and even miserable at times; but I am sorry I gave you any trouble about it. I suppose what you say is right."

"But wait a moment. I tell you that this makes all the difference. Of course, I assume

that you are quite certain of what you say about that young man in New York—that you know he wouldn't be sorry to have the engagement broken off, but would rather you would say the word?"

"Who is likely to know if not myself?" she answered. "I have told you the truth."

"He would rather you would say the word? Then say the word! You ask for my advice—there it is. Tell him he may go to Jericho—or Jaffa, or Jerusalem, whichever he likes; and at the earliest convenient opportunity. Make yourself free at once. Justified?—of course you will be justified. No man has a right to keep a woman in any such position; no woman ought to marry a sneak. No; I told you you might let that unwelcome understanding die of neglect and inanition, because I thought there was no reason for anything else; now I tell you you should shake off those fetters at once, as soon as a letter can cross the Atlantic."

"Ah," said she, rather wistfully, "if only your wife would say as much!"

"She will say precisely the same."

Miss Peggy shook her head.

"No; it's too much to hope for. Men are more considerate to women—more forgiving—

they make allowances. I should be afraid to speak to her about it."

"You needn't be afraid. Haven't you discovered yet that she likes you a little? She can suffer you, as the Tyrolese lover says to his sweetheart. And if you go the right way to work, I know what she will do for you—she will write over to your people in New York, and give them a most fascinating description of the favoured person—that is, if she knows him."

"Oh, but she does!" Miss Peggy cried; and then instantly she drew back, in wild alarm: "Oh, I—I mean—she has always been so kind to me—do you think she would do that?"

"She will do it, if you go the right way about it. She very much likes you to stroke her hair smooth. You might get a little nose-gay of wild-flowers and pin them at her neck. Then, if you are by yourselves, you can sit down beside her, and put your arm within hers, and tell her the whole story——"

"Oh, do you think she would do that for me?" cried Peggy again—and there was a far happier light shining in her face than had been there a few minutes before.

"Of course she will! Why, you poor, weak,

timid, fluttering, solitary thing—wandering all about the world alone and friendless——”

“No; not friendless,” said she—with a very pleasant, modest look in her eyes. “Not friendless. I think I have fallen among very good friends—better than I deserve. But I am not ungrateful, anyway.”

Then a thought seemed to strike her.

“You must be tired standing there all this time, with your foot on the tiller,” said this good-natured lass, rather timidly. “Won’t you let me take it?”

“Oh, no, thank you.”

“And I haven’t said a single word of—of gratitude—to you.”

“You needn’t.”

“And then,” said she, rather incoherently—and the clouds were all away from her forehead now, and her eyes were bright and clear with glad anticipation—“in the summer—later on in the summer—I can see such a happy party of us all together—you know I’ve never been——”

She suddenly stopped. The smooth-gliding boat had carried us along until we had unexpectedly overtaken the pedestrians, who were standing on the bank: they were coming on board now, for it was near lunch-time. And

for all the trouble we were at in stopping and taking them on with us, they rewarded us—at least Queen Tita did—with a number of feeble japes about the study of English history, all of which harmlessly glided off the triple brass of conscious innocence. Was it English history, then, that had brought this light into Peggy's face? She seemed very pleased about something; and modestly grateful; and unusually affectionate even towards this taunting fiend. She held her fingers in hers; and talked to her in a low voice—about nothing in particular; and her eyes were fixed on the smaller woman, so that, very soon—before their mild, clear rays, and the shining honesty of them, and perhaps, also, a little touch of girlish appeal—all that sham sarcasm slunk away abashed. These two went into the saloon hand in hand.

We were now come near to Bradford, which is a clean little grey town cheerfully situated on the side of a hill, amid a profusion of foliage; and here we stopped to bait the horse; while Murdoch attended to our modest wants within. And whether it was the grateful coolness of the saloon—the summer air entering by the open windows and stirring the flowers on the table—or

whether we were glad to be away from cities, and altogether by ourselves again in these still solitudes—or whether there was something peculiarly attractive and winning about Miss Peggy's demeanour towards us all—certain it is that at this little banquet there prevailed much content. She was so very friendly, in a gentle sort of fashion, with everyone; but in especial we could perceive that she wished to be very kind and considerate towards Mr. Duncombe. There were no longer hypocritical appeals to him for aphorisms. His sensations on becoming a reviewer were no longer a subject for mocking inquiry. Nay, on the contrary, she was quite serious, and respectful, and almost anxious, as she hoped that he was now seeing his way clear to the beginning of his work.

“Oh, I'm in no hurry,” said he, lightly. “I've had a general look through the books; and what I'm going to say about them must grow up of itself, bit by bit. I don't think I have done anything this morning—except compose an epitaph——”

“An epitaph, Mr. Duncombe?” Queen Tita cried.

“Yes; I'll read it to you,” said he. He took out his note-book. “It's for a tombstone in a village church-yard:

*It was a nasty cold I caught ;
And little of that cold I thought ;
To lie abed I soon was brought ;
And here I am reduced to naught.*

You see," he continued, with much equanimity, "epitaphs should teach something. They should point a moral. They are the only kind of poetry that comes constantly before the rustic eye. And what better can you do with a dead and buried Hodge than make him a solemn warning to the whole country-side? I can imagine a heap of good being done in that way. Take drink, now: a tombstone would appeal to the conscience of the community more effectively than any sermon. Couldn't we manage something? Let me see."

He took out a pencil, and began scribbling a few words.

"How's this?—

*'Twas ale that robbed me of my ease ;
'Twas ale that twisted up my knees ;
'Twas ale that swelled the doctor's fees ;
And choked my breath ; and here I be's.*

I don't know that that is quite as good as the other; but it's the moral—it's the public warning—that is the valuable thing——"

"Mr. Duncombe," said Queen Tita, "I don't

know how you can be thinking about epitaphs on a day like this. I suppose it was Bath Abbey Church put them in your head. But just look out of that window—everything seems just full of light and colour—look ! ”

And indeed the open window framed a very pretty picture—of summer foliage all shimmering in the sunshine, and of water struck into a silver ripple here and there by the velvet-fingered wind. He put away his notebook without more ado ; and agreed with her that it was not a day for the construction of epitaphs. He was a very biddable youth ; and he had no kind of literary vanity to be wounded. He helped himself again—and freely—to the salad that Colonel Cameron had mixed for us ; and declared that it somehow reminded him of sweetbriar, and wild roses, and June. Or was it that a distinct feeling of June was perceptible in the sweet air blowing in at the window ? We were getting near to June now.

We were now about to enter Crabbe's country—or rather, the country in which he spent the latter years of his life ; for as we drew away from Bradford, we passed within a mile or so of Trowbridge ; thereafter striking north by Hilperton and Staverton. And a

more delightful afternoon never shone over this smiling landscape. We were no longer enveloped in woods; we were more in the open; and there was a light breeze blowing, just enough to temper the heat. But then, again, the wind rarely struck down upon the sheltered waters of the river-like canal; so that the glassy surface mirrored the golden-green masses of the elms that overhung the banks, and showed, besides, here and there, a glimmer of silver and blue. As the evening drew on, the breeze ceased altogether; the cloudless sky was still and serene; a warmer light streamed along those peaceful meadows, where the cattle were grazing. But for the noisy cawing of some rooks, and the occasional flute-note of a cuckoo in some distant grove, the silence was absolute; the smaller birds seemed to know that the golden day was dying, and had ceased to twitter in the hedges.

Meanwhile, those people who had been making their way along the bank had been occupying themselves in various fashions, and in various combinations, too, as chance or fancy dictated. And when they came on board again—as we were drawing near to Seend—it soon became quite apparent that Queen

Tita had had some piece of news imparted to her during the long ramble ashore. Not that any word was spoken. Oh, dear, no. A young lady's secret is a sacred thing. But though she tried to look as grave as an owl, it was plain that she was just a little bit excited; and pleased, also; and inclined to look on Peggy with eyes at once puzzled and affectionate and approving. But what had become of Jack Duncombe?

"Oh," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit (who apparently had been bewildered into forgetfulness), "I was to tell you. There are several locks ahead; and when we get through these, it will be time to stop for the night, he says. And he has gone away to find out some railway-station, to see if he can telegraph to Devizes. He has some friends living near Devizes, he says; and we shall be passing through there to-morrow."

And then blank horror fell upon the steersman of this boat. What might not that awful Court do to us? The tipstaff is a terrible person; Holloway Gaol a fearful destination. But in the meantime we had to encounter these pernicious locks; and the hard work drove speculation out of the brain.

So we laboriously fought our way to the

end of them; and then went along some distance; until, having discovered a quiet and sheltered nook, where there were wide over-branching willows, we ran the boat in there—the Nameless Barge forming a very comfortable little nest in among the leaves. By this time Jack Duncombe had come back; and with news that was welcome to one person on board. If he had really meant to defy the Vice-Chancellor's authority by communicating with the Wiltshire young lady, his felonious purpose had been baffled. He had discovered some little country station—Seend station he said it was—but they could not help him. Either there was no telegraph; or it was too late; or they could not receive private messages.

That was a gracious night, in this unnamed and unknown solitude. We were entirely alone; for we had allowed Murdoch to go off to supper with Columbus and the Horse-Marine in the village; and it was left to the women-folk to clear the dinner-table for themselves. Then (for they were not antagonistic to tobacco) they came out and made themselves snug in the stern-sheets of the boat; and Miss Peggy had her banjo; and the silence around seemed to wait. There should have

been moonlight; but the times and seasons were against us. Nay, we could see but few of the stars in the clear heavens overhead; for the willow-branches were thick: moreover, the red glow streaming out from the windows on the stems and leaves rather attracted the eyes. And you may be sure it was not "Tennessee" that Peggy sang for us on this still summer night.

No; she began—

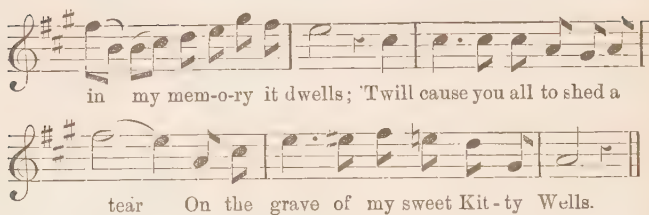
"Once in the dear, dead days beyond recall,
When on the world the mist began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
Low to our hearts Love sang an old sweet song"—

and we could see, by the dim glow coming from the door of the saloon, that Mrs. Three-penny-bit had drawn as close to the girl as the banjo would permit, and that she had placed a hand lightly and kindly on her shoulder. And what do you think was Miss Peggy's next selection? Well, she was aware that a certain song of hers was a particular favourite with one of the persons now listening to her; and she was a grateful lass; and she may have been thinking that she had wished to say some word of thanks for the rough-and-ready advice addressed to her that morning. Here were her thanks, then—or, at least,

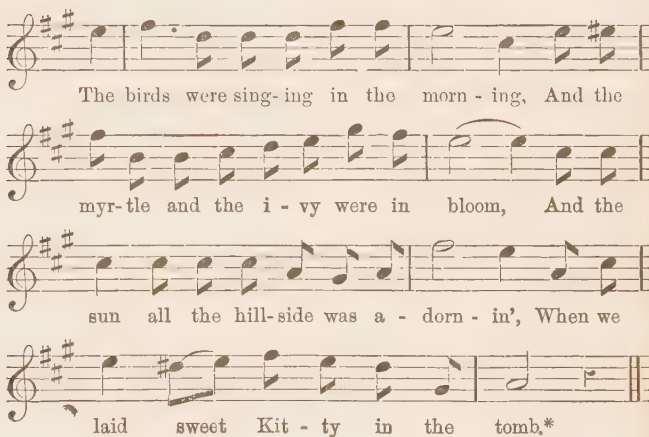
some timid effort to please? For we had grown to have some notion of the inner workings of the mind of this Person without a Character.

The ballad of "Kitty Wells" is not of an intellectual cast, any more than are most of the plantation songs; but the air is pretty and attractive; and this American young lady, to the soft ripple of her banjo, could sing it very sweetly indeed. It seemed to suit her voice somehow; you forgot the nigger fatuities when you heard her tremulous contralto notes; especially when, as on this still night, she sang in a simple and subdued fashion, without effort of any kind. 'This was what the listening silence and the darkness heard:—

You ask what makes this dark-ey weep, Why
 he like others am not gay; What makes the tear roll down his
 cheek From ear - ly morn till close of day? My
 sto - ry, dark - ies, I'll re - late, While



And still more gently she sung the chorus : in the hush of the willow-leaves all around us her rich, clear voice was just audible, and no more.



* The melody as here given Miss Peggy herself was so obliging as to jot down for us ; but she seems to have pitched on a rather high key. Or is this banjo notation? an ignorant person is fain to ask. We never could hear who the composer was—though some inquiries have been made, both in England and America ; but if this should meet his eye—in whatsoever far land he may be—he is entreated to accept our profound apologies for the theft.

Miss Peggy was exceedingly amiable this evening; and would sing whatever was asked of her—one thing after another; until Sir Ewen Cameron interposed (with some brief exhibition of military authority that was entirely uncalled for) and would have no more of such persecution and cruelty. Sir Ewen suggested, instead, an adjournment to the saloon, and a game of cards; but it appeared that the women-folk were bent on retiring early; and so, after they had gone inside, and partaken of a little soda-water, and the like, they were allowed to depart. Who knows what portentous secrets they might not have to discuss in the safe seclusion of the ladies' cabin?

CHAPTER VIII.

“Do you ask what the birds say? The Sparrow, the Dove,
The Linnet and Thrush, say ‘I love, and I love!’
In the winter they’re silent—the wind is so strong,
What it says I don’t know, but it sings a loud song.
But green leaves, and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing, and loving—all come back together!”

Yes, they were all at it again—the linnet and robin; the mavis and merle; the cuckoo telling us of his whereabouts in the heart of the thicket; the larks filling all the wide spaces of the sky with their silver song. But for this universal twittering, and clear carolling, and fluttering of wings, the world was still enough and silent enough. The red kine hardly moved in the meadows golden with buttercups. The olive-green masses of the elms, rising far into the pale blue of the heavens, did not stir a leaf. The warm sunlight seemed to draw forth a hundred scents from herbs and flowers, that hung in the

motionless air. And as if all those glowing colours of bush and tree and blossom were not in themselves enough, we had them repeated on the mirror-like surface of the canal—an inverted fairy-land, with the various hues and tints mysteriously softened and blended together.

As one is idly gazing at all these things, and speculating as to how far a certain white butterfly, that has started early on his travels, will wander before the heat of noon causes him to close his wings on a head of clover, there is a quiet stirring of the willow-branches, and then a footfall on the gang-board connecting the boat with the shore. Turning forthwith one finds that it is Miss Peggy who has come down through those yellowed meadows, and it is Sir Ewen Cameron who is steadying the plank for her. She has been abroad thus early to gather flowers for the breakfast-table, she says; and in each hand she has a great cluster of buttercups. As for the June roses in her cheeks, where did she get them on so extremely still a morning? And as for the speedwell-blue of her eyes—— But she passes hastily into the saloon, for the flower-glasses have to be filled.

Then this long, sandy-haired Highland officer: has he anything to say? He observes that the morning is beautiful—which is no secret. He thinks he saw a trout rise a little bit further along. Presently he puts this question—

“Shall you have any need of Murdoch’s services this autumn?”

“I fear not.”

“He is an exceedingly handy fellow—don’t you think so?”

“I do.”

“And very willing, isn’t he?”

“He is.”

“Well, now, don’t you consider that a young fellow like that would be better in a settled situation than in doing odd jobs about Tobermory, with an occasional month or two’s yachting in the summer?”

“I dare say he would, if it was anything of a situation.”

“Do you think he would come to me at Inverfask?”

“Inverfask?”

“Yes. I would give him a fair wage; he would have employment all the year round; and he might look forward to some increase of pay if he deserved it.”

“A permanent place at Inverfask—is that what you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Well, when you put that offer before him, Murdoch will be a proud lad.”

“And you are sure you don’t want him this autumn?”

“Almost certain—besides, that could not be allowed to interfere.”

“I will go and ask him at once,” said he; and he, too, disappeared into the saloon.

Well, now, the Nameless Barge seemed to be just filled with secrets and mysteries on this busy morning; but of course one had no time to pay heed to such trumpery things; for we had to make an early start in order to get through the chain of locks outside Devizes. Alas! when we came in sight of these, our hearts fell. We had not the courage to attack that appalling ascent. Why, from the far top of the hill right down here to the plain stretched a long, brown, ribbed thing like the under jaw of some mighty saurian monster, its jagged teeth waiting to devour us. It was a hideous object in the midst of this smiling and sun-warmed landscape. Anything in reason we could attempt; but not this; even Jack Duncombe succumbed.

“No,” he said, “there’s nothing in the shape of dogged obstinacy about me. If I have to give in, I give in. I’m of the mind of your countryman, Miss Rosslyn, who was asked why he looked rather depressed. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘my store’s been burnt down, and I’ve lost every cent I had in the world. My wife was in the store; she was burned to death. All my children perished in the fire, too. So now I think I’ve had enough—I ain’t a hog.’ If you could get to heaven by climbing up that Jacob’s ladder, it might be worth while trying; but it isn’t heaven that’s at the top—it’s only Devizes. So I propose we leave Murdoch, and Columbus, and the Horse-Marine to fight it out amongst them—there’s Columbus with his coat off already—and we can walk on to the town, and get letters posted, and telegrams sent off.”

Telegrams? Was he still bent on that mad freak? In any case, it was safer to have no cognizance of it; he might do what he pleased; no questions should be asked. Indeed, they were all of them welcome to such twopenny-halfpenny secrets as they chose to cherish. Here was a brilliant and beautiful morning; the ascent of the long hill (when we had ignominiously left the boat to its fate)

revealed an ever-extending view over a richly-wooded plain; the air was sweet; the trout were rising briskly in the reservoirs attached to the locks; and the matted masses of the water-buttermcup were a blaze of white blossoms. The huge saurian jaw was disregarded. Miss Peggy, head in air, and marching proudly along, was repeating to herself—

“Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,

He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day's dawing,’

which she had got nearly perfect now. Colonel Cameron was apologising to Mrs. Threepenny-bit for having carried off her faithful Ganymede, to serve at Inverfask House. Jack Duncombe was eagerly surveying that wide plain: might not two young ladies be early abroad on so pleasant a morning—driving a smart little pony-chaise along the leafy lanes?

If there is any deader town than Devizes, in this country or any other, the present writer has no acquaintance with it. The very width of the central thoroughfare—filled, as it was on this morning, with a pale white sunlight—gives a sense of solitariness and loneliness. What bold man would cross this wide and empty street, drawing upon himself the eyes of the unseen community?—would he not rather slink round by the church, and

gain the opposite pavement unobserved? When we called in at the small post-office, the people seemed quite startled by this apparition of visitors. And when we went for a ramble through the silent town—glancing into the unfrequented shops and the lifeless-looking little parlour-windows, it was to think of the placid, apathetic, unvarying lives led by these good folk as a very strange sort of thing. In one of these shops—devoted to the sale of apples and confections, apparently—a young girl was sitting behind the counter, reading what appeared to be some kind of cheap journal of fiction. There was no one else in the place; it looked as if no one else ever had been there, or was expected; and, as we passed, the girl happened to raise her head from the periodical she held in her hands. Her eyes looked a trifle beglamoured and unobservant.

“And you fancy, now,” says Jack Duncombe to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who has been making remarks, “that that girl leads a very lonely life—in that little bit of a shop—in this empty town? Why, I will wager that she is at this moment back again into the most gay and brilliant of fashionable society, listening to the most beautiful lan-

guage, in gorgeous and gilded saloons. She isn't in Devizes at all; she is moving through splendid palaces; and breathlessly watching how her particular friends are getting on—and not one of them less than a Marquis. ‘*My Lord, in your Lordship’s honour to-night the fountains shall spout naught but perfume; and a thousand wax candles shall shed their brilliancy o’er the banquet.*’ ‘*Lit by a spark from your Ladyship’s beaming eyes,*’ responded the chivalrous nobleman, bowing low. In the society that that lonely shop-girl enjoys—that she revels in from morning till night—lords and ladies converse like lords and ladies; and Duchesses know what is expected of them. I never had but one conversation with a Duchess; and she talked all the time about her sciatic nerve, and what the *massage* treatment was doing for her.”

He was pretending to be very much at his ease, as we wandered along through the little town, chatting aimlessly the while; but all the same he would from time to time direct a swift backward glance along the wide, empty thoroughfare. Was there still a chance, then, that a certain pony-chaise might suddenly appear in sight? One almost began to share in his secret anticipation. It

would be rather nice if Maud and her sister were to come back with us to the boat for luncheon. Young ladies of somewhat robust nerve, one had gathered. Perhaps with coal-black eyes, and country cheeks, and rippling laughter. The divinity that doth hedge a ward of Court would hardly be visible in the snug seclusion of the saloon; and if anything came of it—if that pestilent Vice-Chancellor should grow fractious and perverse, could we not go before him and swear it was all the result of an accident, seeing there had been no chance of sending off any telegram from Seend? But the great white sunlit thoroughfare remained as empty as ever. A cat slunk along by the church railings—there was no other sign of life. And so—wistfully giving up all hope of encountering the blushing Maud and her jovial sister—we slowly toiled away up the hill again, to see if Columbus and his mates had successfully vanquished the saurian monster.

Now perhaps it was that some school had been set free; but at all events when the Nameless Barge drew near the outskirts of the little town, her appearance was hailed with delight by a considerable concourse of small girls and boys; and these interesting

brats were speedily engaged in summoning their elder relatives ; so that, by the time the boat had reached the bridge, it was being regarded by a population greater than any we had supposed Devizes to possess. To escape from the curiosity of these cottagers did not at first sight seem an easy matter, until we espied a yard fenced on three sides by a tall paling, and coming down to the water's edge ; accordingly, we shoved the boat along to this place of shelter, and made her fast, defeating the following crowd. Columbus and the Horse-Marine went away to get their dinner, which they had stoutly earned ; and Murdoch came on board to set forth some bit of lunch for us. Jack Duncombe seemed somewhat depressed. No doubt it was tantalising to know that those young ladies were so near, and that presently we should be moving away. As for Holloway Gaol, and its limited interviews, and its lights out at such and such an hour, he probably did not think of all that.

At lunch we were listening to a far from fiery controversy between Miss Rosslyn and Colonel Cameron as to the respective merits of Monarchical and Republican forms of government, when something occurred to withdraw

our attention from that by no means engrossing subject.

“You see,” the tall soldier was saying, in his quiet, persuasive fashion; and she was an apt and attentive scholar rather than a fierce disputant, “you must remember that now-days kings are not self-created. A king reigns not because he chooses to govern a people, but because the people choose to be governed by him. The queen-bee does not coerce the hive; the hive agree to respect and guard the queen-bee. And even in the old days tyrants and tyrannies had their uses. They aroused antagonism, heroism, patriotism. Italy, when she had to fight the Austrian, became splendid; now she’s nothing. When a nation has got all the freedom it wants, it takes to making money; and that is the basest—the most degrading—of occupations——”

Thus he was going on when a very singular object became visible outside. The smaller windows of the saloon were just about level with the bank; and, indeed the nettles, daisies, and dandelions growing there almost touched the panes. It was startling, therefore, to discover, among these weeds, a large pair of hobnailed boots. At first, we could not imagine how they came to be there, and

to be so remarkably close to us ; but presently we perceived that above each boot there was a strip of corduroy. And then it dawned upon us that here were the lower portions of a human being—a foundation, as it were, on which the fancy could build up any kind of superstructure it chose. *Ex pede Herculem.* The boots were large, not to say huge. Was this, then, some young giant who had scrambled over the tall paling? Or perhaps the owner of the boatyard, who had come in by the legitimate gate, and was now staring at this strange craft that had invaded his premises? Jack Duncombe solved the problem. He went outside and addressed the inquisitive stranger. We heard him talking, coaxing, expostulating ; then, as these invitations were of no avail, he would appear to have stepped ashore, and gripped the newcomer by the scruff of the neck : the next moment we beheld him at the door of the saloon—a shock-headed boy of ten or twelve, whose stolid bovine gaze seemed to have no curiosity in it—only a blank wonder. He was asked if he had seen any boat like this before ; but vouchsafed no reply. Mechanically he accepted a lump of cake that Mrs. Threepenny-bit cut for him ; but there was no word of thanks.

“Boy,” said Jack Duncombe to him, solemnly, “that is cake. And you have a mouth. Or are you afraid? Is it possible that you have discovered the fallacy of the proverb that you mayn’t eat your cake and have it too? Have you eaten your cake and been only too painfully aware that you had it, and were likely to have it?”

The boy looked at him—and looked. Then he looked at the saloon—at the table—at us—and gazed. Finally, as there was nothing to be done with him, Jack Duncombe, figuratively speaking, threw him ashore again; and got ready to pole the boat across to the tow-path, where Captain Columbus was now waiting.

After leaving Devizes, there are fifteen miles of plain sailing without the interruption of a single lock; so that we made good progress this afternoon. The canal, which is here so little used that it abounds with all kinds of water-plants—the white buttercup conspicuous amongst them—winds along a high plateau which affords extensive views over the neighbouring landscape. Not that we saw this somewhat lonely stretch of country under the most favourable conditions. As we stole along by Bishops Cannings and All Cannings

and Stanton Fitzwarren the still air seemed to be threatening thunder; the skies were of a cloudy milky-white; and the hills that rose to the horizon-line both on north and south—Roughbridge Hill, Easton Hill, St. Ann's Hill, Etchilhampton Hill, Wivelsford Hill, and the like—were slowly deepening in gloom. Then came rain; and forthwith these idle people fled into the saloon, to books and writing, and tea and what not. All but the faithful Peggy, that is to say. Miss Peggy not only went and fetched the steersman his water-proof, but she also brought out her own; and having drawn the hood over her pretty brown hair, and fastened it securely under the chin, she took up her position on the steering-thwart. Was she still anxious, then, to show her gratitude, in some vague tentative way? At all events her companionship on this sombre afternoon was sufficiently welcome.

But one soon began to discover what had brought Miss Peggy out into the rain; her remarks about the weather were speedily over.

“Has Colonel Cameron,” she asks presently, with a very becoming hesitation, and with downcast eyes, “has Colonel Cameron said anything—anything particular—to you?”

“Nothing very particular.”

“No, I suppose not,” she continues, with the same pretty hesitation. “I had to ask him not to say anything—because—because I don’t wish Mr. Duncombe to know. But you ought to know. Yes, you ought to know——”

“Do you think I don’t know?”

“What?”

“And this is the way they keep a young lady’s secret!—making it as plain as the nose on a man’s face or a weather-cock on a steeple. And you are especially anxious to conceal it from Jack Duncombe, are you? Don’t you think it possible Mr. Duncombe may have his own little affairs to attend to? Well, well, you’ve done it at last, I suppose; and it’s very little you know of the fate you are rushing upon—you poor, fluttering, timid, solitary creature. Banishment to the regions of perpetual ice—that is a pretty future for you. Think of the gales howling down from the North Sea—the glens blocked up with snow—no communication with the rest of the world—the rivers and lakes hard frozen—hail changing to sleet, and sleet changing to hail—a Polar bear prowling round the crofts—a walrus——”

“And a carpenter—you mustn’t forget the

carpenter," says this young lady, who isn't as easily frightened as you might imagine.

"The roads impassable—no letters or newspapers for a month at a stretch—if you want to go out of the house you'll have to get a path cut through the snow—— And what will poor Peggy do then, poor thing?"

"Poor Peggy will wrap herself up in her great big ulster," she answers placidly. "Yes. Your wife is going to write to the island of Harris for a web of homespun cloth for me; and I'm going to have heaps of things made of it—an ulster, to begin with. But it isn't so very dreadful in the Highlands, is it?"

"Dreadful in the Highlands, you simple innocent! Why, don't you know that that blessed land has hot water laid on, winter and summer? There never was a country so carefully provided for. The Gulf of Mexico is the pot they boil the water in; and then it is taken all the way across the Atlantic, and poured along those happy shores. So you needn't wonder that they have camellias growing in the open air; and tree-fuchsias covering the fronts of houses; and bats flying about in January——"

Now, this was to her a most interesting subject; and we were far from blessing Jack

Duncombe when he came bustling out with his discovery that there was a great white horse cut on the side of a hill we were then passing—about Alton Priors. We cared not a jot about that big, long-necked, ill-shapen creature that looked more like a camelopard than anything else. We knew not what it meant; and were not inclined to ask. Besides, the country about here is of a commonplace character—hardly worth regarding. Moreover, we had seen horses cut upon hillsides elsewhere. And again, we had private matters to talk over. But the distraction served to draw attention to the fact that the rain had ceased; so waterproofs were forthwith thrown aside; and we were glad to welcome a few pale touches of yellow among those lowering clouds.

However, the evening never really cleared; indeed, twilight came over prematurely; and so, when we got to New Mill Bridge, we made up our minds to remain there for the night. There must have been some hamlet in the neighbourhood; for two or three small children came along through the fields to stare at this strange thing all afire in the dusk; but presently they, too—as well as Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine—had disappeared; and

we were left to shut ourselves in from the now darkening world.

That evening, amid our various occupations and diversions (it is to be hoped that the sensitive ears of the night were not too much shocked; but this small company seemed mirthfully inclined, for some occult reason or another), a good deal was said about Savernake Forest; and we hoped we should have a good day on the morrow for a glimpse of the only one of the ancient forests of England that does not belong to the Crown. But it was very little of Savernake Forest we were fated to see—it was nothing at all, in short. When we got away the next morning, we found that the canal still continued at this high level; but that the hills and terraces fringing the forest were still higher; so that all that met the eye were some green slopes and banks, a profusion of hawthorn-bushes covered with bloom, and some hedges white with cow-parsley. However, after we had made our way through a tunnel (a train rattled by overhead when we were inside, and there was a rolling reverberation as of thunder) and got along a bit further, the landscape once more opened out around us—rising at the horizon into far ridges of low-lying hill,

mostly crowned with wood. It was not a brilliant specimen of a June day; there was still a sullen look about the sky, and a heavy feeling in the air; none the less, we had never before heard the larks so busy—the whole wide world seemed filled with their singing.

Now, what happened to us during that day must, for various reasons, be chronicled briefly and with discretion. We entertained two visitors, who were curious to see what the Nameless Barge was like. When they had dismissed the dog-cart by which they had managed to overtake us, they were easily persuaded to stay to luncheon; and Queen Tita was very gracious to them. After luncheon, they had a mind to see how the saloon appeared at night (having heard something of our mild revelries); and so all the red blinds were drawn, and the lamps and candles lit, making a very pretty show. Then we went outside; but they were of an enterprising disposition, these two; and asked why, instead of standing at the bow, or sitting in the stern-sheets, we did not take up our quarters on the roof—thereby securing a wider view? Well, that was a command; forthwith Inverfask and Murdoch (Jack Duncombe spoke no word to these young

ladies, and apparently remained unaware of their existence) had between them haled forth a sufficiency of rugs and cushions (Utrecht velvet); and these being placed along the house-roof, the whole party of voyagers clambered up thither, and took their places, in more or less of an Eastern fashion, as it pleased them. Unfortunately, this experiment was very nearly ending in a catastrophe. The Nameless Barge had never been so top-hampered before; and at one point—whether the rope caught on a stump, or whether there was some sudden bend—we found her quietly heeling over; and if Murdoch, who was steering, had not jumped to the opposite side, and put all his weight on the rail, the whole of us must certainly have been deposited in the water. The young ladies shrieked—and were vastly amused at the same time. We parted with them at Hungerford, walking up to the station with them. They were very grateful for the little entertainment we had been able to afford them. Jack Duncombe said no word of good-bye—no, not even when they were in the railway carriage. We returned to the boat, and continued on our way, heartily hoping to hear no more of that adventure.

This evening we moored near Kintbury, and after dinner we set forth—all of us, that is to say, except the Short-noticer, who was busy with his books—on an exploration of this straggling, picturesque little place, whose old-fashioned, gabled, and casemated houses, and ancient square-towered church looked very well in the wan, clear twilight. And as Colonel Cameron was walking in front with his hostess, Miss Peggy had a good deal to say to her companion about both these people.

“Colonel Anne is not so tall as Colonel Cameron,” she observes, rather in an undertone—for they are not very far ahead—“but she is twice and three times the Jacobite he is. I do believe she would have raised a regiment for Bonnie Prince Charlie if she had lived in those days; and I know she would have gone wild about Flora Macdonald if she had been in London when Flora was released from prison. I like to hear Colonel Cameron speak of ‘Miss Macdonald’; it isn’t merely that it is respectful; it sounds as if the Camerons of Inverfask and the Macdonalds of Kingsburgh were neighbouring families, or related to each other, and knew each other quite well. He has a good many things that were bought at the sale of Kingsborough

House; and I suppose they are all, in a kind of way, connected with Prince Charlie. I wonder what I should do with the little mirror-frame that came from Fassiefern; would you put a piece of old glass in it if that could be got, or leave it as it is?"

And then, again she says:—

"What a lot I've got to do when I go back to town!—the books I must get—a History of the Highland Regiments first and foremost—a History of the Clans—I don't know what all. Your wife has promised to lend me a volume of pipe-music, though she says those marches are so difficult to play on the piano. Which are your favourites?"

"‘The Barren Rocks of Aden’ and ‘The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar.’"

"I will remember those. The 79th Regiment—isn't that the Cameron Highlanders?"

"It is."

"And the 42nd—that is the Black Watch, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And the Gordon Highlanders—they are the 75th, aren't they?"

"They are. But why this catechism?"

"Oh, well," she says evasively, "Sir Ewen is very anxious that your wife and I should

go down to Aldershot to be shown over the camp, and of course one would not like to be quite ignorant——”

“But do you imagine that Aldershot Camp is made up of Highland regiments?”

“I wonder,” she continues (and now a window is being lit here and there in the village—the pale yellow glow of the candles projecting upon the blind the shadow of the geranium-pots ranged on the inner sill), “I wonder where he keeps his medals. I do wish you would persuade him to send for them. Couldn’t he have them forwarded to Reading or to Henley? If you only knew how I am longing to see them. Well—I have been thinking—perhaps he has neglected them—for men are so careless; but your wife and I could brighten them up, and brush the cases, and make them neat and smart for him. Women can do that better than a man can.”

Presently she says—

“Does he wear them when he goes to a Levée at Buckingham Palace?”

“Haven’t the least idea.”

“The Victoria Cross, anyway. He must wear the Victoria Cross at any State ceremony where the Queen is present, surely?”

Is it true that when the Queen presents the Victoria Cross to anyone, she pins it on his breast with her own hands?"

"I believe so."

"I should like to see that done," she observes absently.

And then again—as she is regarding the tall soldier in front of her, who is lounging idly along, one hand behind his back, the other holding a big cigar which he has not taken the trouble to light—she laughs a little, and says—

"Just to think—that I used to be afraid of him!"

This was a long-protracted ramble; and the curiosity of our young American friend about everything relating to the Highlands and the modes of life there proved to be quite insatiable, just as it was simple, honest, and ingenuous. When we got back to the boat the dusk had come down; and all the little red windows were aglow; but Mrs. Threepenny-bit did not go on board; Colonel Cameron did; and we guessed that she had sent him to summon Mr. Duncombe away from his books.

"Your servant, Colonel!" says Miss Peggy, as we come up.

"What do you mean?" the smaller woman

answers. "Have you changed services, Peggy? You've been a sailor all the way through—are you going to leave the navy for the army?"

"Yes," says Miss Peggy, lightly. "I have enlisted. And what's more—I've got my marching orders."

"Where for?"

This tall young recruit brings up the palm of her hand to her forehead, and makes a very fair imitation of a military salute.

"For Inverfask, Colonel," she says—and the night conceals the laughing shyness of her cheeks.

CHAPTER IX.

“Ye happy fields, unknown to noise and strife,
The kind rewarders of industrious life;
Ye shady woods, where once I used to rove,
Alike indulgent to the Muse and Love;
Ye murmuring streams, that in meanders roll,
The sweet composers of the pensive soul!
Farewell!—The city calls me from your bowers;
Farewell, amusing thoughts and peaceful hours!”

EARLY on this fair morning the welcome sunlight is all around us—touching here and there on the red roofs half hidden among the willows and elms, making the old-fashioned inn and the ivied bridge quite picturesque, and striking into the clear water so that we can see shoals of small fish darting this way and that over the beds of green weed. And here is Miss Peggy—herself as radiant as the dawn; her eyes shining, and without malice; a placid content upon her tranquil lips.

“So this is the last day of our voyage?” she says.

“The last full day. We shall leave a few miles to do to-morrow, so as to get into Reading about noon.”

“When one looks back,” she says rather pensively, “all those places we have seen appear to be very far away now. Doesn’t it seem ages since we saw Windsor Castle, with the Royal standard high up in the pale blue sky? Do you remember the fearful rain at Oxford—and the floods——”

“And Mr. A’Becket?—yes. Tell me, did you ever answer the letter he was so kind as to send you about the antiquities of Gloucester?”

“Well, I did not,” she says hastily. “Don’t you think your wife will do that for me? She ought. The information was for the whole party.”

“We shall be having some photographs of the boat done at Reading; you can send him one of those: that will square accounts.”

“Do you remember the flooded Cherwell—and how the Banbury people helped us—and then those moonlight nights at Warwick, and the ghostly drive to Kenilworth? Then came the quiet meadows about Stratford——”

“Yes ; and the sudden appearance of Rosalind in a sitting-room of the Shakespeare Hotel——”

She looks up quickly.

“You weren’t reading your paper all the time?”

“Not all the time.”

She laughs a little.

“I half suspected it. I was sure a man’s curiosity would get the better of him. They talk about women! I thought you weren’t so much taken up with politics. Well, what did you think of the performance?”

“I thought it was very clever—until you jumped behind the curtain, which Rosalind wouldn’t have done. Rosalind wouldn’t have been scared to death by a parlour-maid.”

“I wonder who is likely to know most of what Rosalind would have done—you or I?” she says saucily.

“To-night will be our last night on board. You must have the costume still with you. May we hope for a repetition?”

“Before Mr. Duncombe? My gracious, no!” she exclaims. “I shouldn’t mind Colonel Cameron so much—for your wife went and told him all about it; but Mr. Duncombe—no.”

“Why, what can it matter? If you have worn the costume at a fancy-dress ball——”

“Yes; that’s just where it is,” she says. “You don’t mind any sort of nonsense, if everybody else is in it. And I thought we might have some kind of masquerading, when we got into the Forest of Arden; that is why I brought the dress.”

“And there was none?”

“No—for Colonel Cameron was with us then to keep us in order. Ah, well, I fancy a quieter mood was better fitted for those strange solitudes. Do you remember the night we sate outside in the starlight, listening to the nightingale—with the boat all lit up among the dark branches? If there are any ghosts in the Forest of Arden, they must have wondered what the fiery thing was, in among the willows. And all that, too, seems a long while ago, doesn’t it?” she continues. “Do you remember the beautiful wood we rambled through on a quiet Sunday morning, just outside one of the tunnels? I suppose it must belong to somebody; but it looked to me as if no one had ever seen it before. Do you remember the primroses, and the wild hyacinths, and the red flower—what was it——?”

“The campion.”

“And then to leave all that beautiful place and the sunlight and go away into a black hole, scraping and tearing through the solid earth. We were getting used to the tunnels by that time, I think; but the first one—the great long one—was just a little too dreadful. Do you remember the unearthly voice—

‘My father died a drunkard,
And I was left alone,’

and the small lamps far away in the darkness, and the red glow from the saloon showing us the rocky wall around us? I suppose if we *had* bumped hard against the side, it would have been Angel Gabriel for the whole of us. Then came the long sailing down the Severn—why, even that seems ages ago. I suppose it is because each day is so crowded with different experiences: one is so interested at the moment that you forget what has gone before—until one looks back. And there will be a great deal of looking back when once it is all over and we are in London again. It will be an occupation for many an evening—if you will allow me to come and see you sometimes.”

“We will allow you to come and see us sometimes, if you are good.”

“There is one thing,” she resumes—as she

is idly watching the small fish down in the clear deeps: "I have got to know something of what England is really like. I suppose when I hear people at home talking about their trip to England I shall be saying to myself, 'What, *you!*—you think you have seen England? You haven't at all! You have only seen railway-England!'"

"Then you are returning to America?" one observes casually.

"Why, of course, I must go back," she says; "but for how long is quite a different matter. I think my friends at Bournemouth must have had enough of me."

"There's a house in London where your presence might be tolerated—indeed, they might even pretend to welcome you. And as you are going to Scotland with us in the autumn, in any case, why make two bites of a cherry?"

"You are very kind; but I think it will have to be America first and Scotland afterwards," she makes answer; and here the subject drops; for Murdoch's silver tinkle summons us within.

At breakfast there was clearly a foreshadowing of the end; for already these good people were beginning to talk of the chief impressions

produced by this long water-ramble of ours. Miss Peggy's fixed ideas seemed to be the remoteness and the silence of those solitudes through which we had passed, and the profusion of wildflowers. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, on the other hand, had some fancy that in these rural wanderings you got to understand something of the hold that the Church of England has on the national mind—the prominence of it even in the landscape—the small, venerable, strong, square-towered building dominating the tiniest village, the great Cathedral the principal feature, and the proudest possession, of the town. These imaginings were vague, but we knew the sentiment that prompted them; and we knew that the importance accorded to the Church, whether in hamlet or in city, must have been grateful to her heart. Jack Duncombe said that his chief recollection was of waking up among willow-branches and wondering what part of the world he was in; also that red-blinds are capital things for windows, for they tell you in a moment whether there is sunlight outside or not; for the rest, he looked back upon a most judicious combination of exercise and idleness; and then he wound up with something very nice and appropriate about

the companionship he had enjoyed, which was, no doubt, fully appreciated by his hostess and our pretty Peggy. Amid all these pleasant souvenirs, what was our surprise to find that Sir Ewen Cameron—the gentle Inverfask—alone was moved to rage and resentment!

“I don’t mind owning it,” said he, “but for the rest of my life I shall cherish an undying hatred of the cuckoo. It is a pity. You think of the cuckoo as the spirit of the woods—why, you might take it as the presiding genius of a trip like this. The beast! I never knew him before. In season and out of season—in the times of heaviest rain—when not another bird is astir—when everything else is as still as the grave—that fool of a fowl keeps calling away, with a persistency that is simply maddening. I shall never hear a cuckoo-clock without wanting to drive a charge of No. 4 shot through the works of it. I used to like the cuckoo. I would no more have dreamed of shooting one than of shooting a wren or a robin——”

“Sir Ewen, you wouldn’t shoot a cuckoo!” Mrs. Threepenny-bit cried.

“I won’t say ‘Yes,’ and I won’t say ‘No,’” he answered darkly; “but it would be awkward

for the cuckoo if it happened to come in the line of my gun. There's a blood-feud between us henceforth. Fortunately, I never heard of any cuckoo being in the Inverfask neighbourhood; so there won't be any temptation there."

This was a perfect day for the last. The overarching blue had not even a speck of cloud; the atmosphere was singularly clear and vivid; a fresh breeze tempered the heat of the sun, and stirred the water into shining breadths of silver. Nor was there any want of exercise for those so inclined; for this Kennet and Avon Canal seems to have quite fallen out of use; and not only had we to open the locks and the swing-bridges for ourselves, but these had grown so stiff that it was with the greatest toil and difficulty we got through. Occasionally our man-power proved insufficient; dust and stones had soldered up the junction between the bridge and the roadway so that the former refused to move on its pivot; in which case we had to get a rope and affix it to the horse, and then with his hauling and our pushing the slow-creaking thing would begin to revolve—to the no small wonderment of the cottagers. As there was no one at all looking after the locks,

in order to save time Jack Duncombe and Captain Columbus went on ahead to get them open for us ; and as the Young Dramatist was rather fond of hard work, he had plenty of it over those rotten old gates and paddles. When they had got the lock ready, we could see them, a long way off, sitting in the sunlight—in their shirt-sleeves—awaiting us ; and a rumour that subsequently prevailed, to the effect that Captain Columbus utilized these intervals of rest in “snatching” pike from among the reeds—by means of an unholy instrument that he possessed—is almost certainly groundless. At least we had no pike for dinner that evening.

Our route at first lay through a long stretch of level marsh-land bounded on the north by a range of hills, on the wooded slopes of which are set a series of noble mansions, but at such distances apart that no doubt each proud owner, girt about by his “policies,” is monarch of all he surveys. As we glided along through the hawthorn-scented air, our chief difficulty was to tell whether we were on a river or a canal, for the Kennet and Avon Canal and the river Kennet intertwist themselves in a remarkable manner, and seem to have all their chief characteristics in

common. Which was it—as we were getting on to Newbury—that showed us, through the pellucid water, large subaqueous forests of various hues of green, with prodigious numbers of good-sized perch hanging motionless—or only moving a fin—until the prow of the Nameless Barge was almost on them, when they would make a sudden shoot out of danger? Miss Peggy was called to the bow of the boat to watch this performance. Fat fellows those perch were, with their striped sides and red fins; and mostly they lay in the clear spaces among the weeds, so that we could see them distinctly enough; nay, the wonder was that they were so long in seeing us, for again and again we seemed to be on the point of running down one of them when the plump little water-zebra would make a sudden dart aside. It was rather pleasant to cleave through this transparent world of wonders—at least, Miss Peggy seemed to find it so. She was clinging to the iron rail at the edge of the house-roof, so as to make sure she shouldn't go over; sometimes she hummed a bit of "Kitty Wells," but in no mournful mood; the sunlight twisted strands of gold among the soft brown of her hair; no doubt she felt the

velvet-blowing breeze cool and fresh about her face. There was no need for all of us to be labouring away at those rotten old locks. Some people like gratuitous work, and no doubt it does them good. Even Sir Ewen Cameron, who was usually active enough, had not joined that volunteer brigade; he was sitting in the stern-sheets, talking to his hostess—and in a sufficiently serious manner. We did not know what he was consulting her about, and we did not care. We were bent on catching a perch asleep; and a hundred and a hundred times we were so nearly succeeding that it seems hard to call the result a defeat.

About mid-day we came in sight of Newbury, the pink houses of which looked very pleasant among the golden meadows and the various greens of poplar and maple. A brisk and lively little town we found it to be, and of much quaint picturesqueness in its setting and surroundings; and perhaps Queen Tita regarded it with all the greater favour that she was almost certainly ignorant of its ancient renown. For what would she have said if she had been told that a body of Newbury clothweavers had actually been audacious enough to march to Flodden Field?

She would have indignantly denied that it was by their ell-wands the "Flowers o' the Forest were a' wede away." As for the fighting in Charles's time, Newbury itself had probably but little to do with that: while the Newbury of to-day looks as if it never had much association with slaughter and bloodshed of any sort, so bright and cheerful is it, and so full of a business-like modern activity. Not that we lingered very long in the place after having paid a visit to the telegraph-office and also made a few purchases. We returned to the Nameless Barge, which was attracting a vast amount of notice at the bridge, and had her pushed along into a place of quietude and privacy; then Columbus and the Horse-Marine were set free to seek out their mid-day meal and also provender for the horse; and then we assembled in the saloon, which was pleasantly cool after the glare of the sun in Newbury streets.

At lunch a very important matter came on for discussion: it was the question as to whether the bye-laws of the Kennet Conservancy Board could be held to be binding on a free-born citizen of the United States. The fact is, we knew that a little later on

we should be in the immediate neighbourhood of some very famous stretches of trouting-water, if not actually passing through them. We had an American split-cane rod on board, with plenty of light tackle and small flies. We had also an American on board. We English folk would, of course, pay attention to the notice-boards describing the awful pains and penalties incurred by anyone found fishing in the preserved waters; but did these rules and regulations apply in the case of a foreigner? Mr. Duncombe, who was a Lawyer as well as a Dramatist and a Short-noticer, was distinctly of opinion that they did not apply. Colonel Cameron, on the other hand, held that it was of no consequence whether they did or not. A free-born American, he maintained, would naturally fish wherever he wanted to fish, and would never dream he was committing a crime; while to prosecute him for so doing would be to raise a grave international question on quite insufficient grounds. If the Kennet Conservancy Board (he said) were to drag the two nations into war over a matter of this kind, their conduct would be severely animadverted upon by the newspapers. Mrs. Threepenny-bit pointed out that Peggy (if we were referring

to her) could plead that she had never seen the notices in question; for an American—with experiences of advertisements displayed on every prominent feature of a landscape—instinctively and resentfully turns away from a board stuck up on a tree. The person at the head of the table wanted to know, as a matter of argument, what would be the result if the trout were consenting parties: if they only knew the chance held out to them, might they not gladly accept it, and take for their motto—“And Beauty draws us with a single hair?” Finally, Colonel Cameron went to a certain fishing-basket, and coolly brought forth therefrom a book of flies. Without more ado, he was going to teach Peggy—it appeared—to break the law, and put us all in peril of jail.

We had a delightful stroll this afternoon along the banks of the winding water-way that is sometimes the canal and sometimes the Kennet, and sometimes both combined. The land in our immediate neighbourhood still continued marshy—here and there flushed pink with masses of ragged-robin; and occasionally there were nursery-beds of water-cress, with clear rills running through them. The river-side path was profuse with wild

flowers and long lush grass ; and everywhere were hawthorn-trees and hawthorn-bushes smothered in bloom. A perfect silence prevailed over this wide, flat, swampy district, save for the cry of a startled peewit, or the distant soft tinkle of a sheep-bell. As to whether we paused at any point of our long ramble to allow our young American friend to try the split-cane rod, nothing shall be set down here: international complications should be studiously avoided.

As the mellow evening drew on apace, we began to think it was but little wonder the Kennet river was haunted by artists. To be sure, the country around seemed to us, who had been in more lonesome wilds, to have a kind of suburban look about it ; but then we were drawing near to civilisation and the great highway of the Thames ; while as for the Kennet itself, it seemed to woo the landscape painter at every sylvan turn. Just before we got to Aldermaston, we passed along and under a magnificent avenue of overbranching elms and ash and poplar ; and the masses of foliage, rising far into the evening sky, were aglow in the now westering light. Aldermaston itself—or such outlying bit of it as was visible to us—had “F.

Walker" written on every feature of it—the wide river, the shallow fords, the sandy banks, the trees and scattered cottages warmed by the quiet sunset radiance. When we got to our moorings for the night—under some tall larch-trees in private grounds, the owner of which was most courteous to us—there was the faintest touch of crimson low down in the west, and the pale crescent of the new moon hung in the golden-clear sky.

It was our last night on board; and yet it cannot be said we were a particularly mournful company. No; for in spite of all kinds of sinister warnings and prophecies—and in spite of difficulties that at the moment threatened to be insurmountable—we had brought our expedition to a successful issue; and all we had to do now was to celebrate our triumph by a little frolic at Henley, to aid in which a few innocent young creatures of both sexes had been summoned. But in the meantime we had to decide what was to be done with the Nameless Barge. To-morrow we should be back in the Thames again, at Reading. Should we take her down to Kingston, whence we had started, and find her quarters there? Or should we send her up the river to Henley, with a view to the forthcoming Regatta?

"I will settle that matter for you," said Colonel Cameron, as we sate at dinner. "Or rather, I have settled it for you. I am going to buy this boat."

"Really!" says one of us, who seems to think he might have been consulted.

"Yes," he continues, in a very cool manner; "and I will show you why. If you keep her at Henley or anywhere else on the Thames, you will be continually planning trips and excursions, which will waste a great deal of your time. You will want to get value for your money. You would get value in one way; but not in another. She would be a standing temptation to you. Therefore I am going to buy the boat from you and take her away."

"But, Sir Ewen," Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaims in amazement, "what on earth could you do with a boat like this?"

"I will explain that to you," says this tall Highlander, with great equanimity. "Just below the belt of wood at Inverfask there is a quiet little bay, very fairly protected by rocks—in fact, close to the shore it is perfectly sheltered. I propose to anchor a buoy some way out; and have a wire rope connecting it with the land; then, you perceive,

by means of a traveller, you could run this boat along whenever you wished; and you would be out at sea, safe and secure—a small floating home that would be very convenient for a hundred things. You might want to give your visitors afternoon tea. Or you might have a little dinner-party in the saloon, for the fun of the thing: I have secured Murdoch—he will be captain, cook, and steward. Or you might be quite by yourselves; and if it was a hot evening—and the midges troubling you on shore—you just step on board, and haul yourselves out to sea. Or again, supposing Mr. Duncombe were coming round that way—I hope he will—and wanted a quiet day's work done, wouldn't that be a secure retreat for him? There could be no better isolation, surely, or more perfect silence: that would be a place to write!"

"It sounds tempting, certainly," young Shakespeare made answer — perhaps with wistful visions of *not* absolute isolation floating before his mind.

"Of course, you would have to ask permission," Inverfask continued; "and not from me. No, not from me; it is not for myself I propose to make the purchase; it is to be a little present."

Why was it that all this time our pretty Peggy had been sitting with eyes downcast? Did she know of this audacious scheme; and could it concern her in any way?

“Then,” said he, “when I have got possession of the boat—and I have shown you how absolutely necessary and reasonable it is that I should get possession of her—to hand her over, that is—then she will no longer be known as the Nameless Barge. Oh, no; when she is at her new moorings in the north we must find a proper name for her.” He looked across the table (and Peggy’s eyes were still downcast). “And do you know what I propose to call her?—Well, I have been thinking I could not do better than call her ROSALIND’S BOWER.” •

THE END.

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